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ABSTRACT

This proceedings of the 17th annual conference of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) contains 28 keynote addresses and conference papers. Major conference themes were vocational education and training (VET) in rural schools, small schools, flexible rural delivery systems, and the community as a resource and support for education. Keynote addresses are: "VET in Rural Schools" (Mike Frost); "Why Aligning Curriculum and Assessment in New Times Is Ultimately a Pedagogy Question" (Paul Herschell); "Swimming against the Tide" (Bob Meyenn); and "Aliens in the Classroom?" (Faith Trent). Refereed papers are: "Learning Partnerships in Rural Early Childhood Settings" (Kennece Coombe, Joy Lubawy); "Cut Your Teeth on Online Collaborative Projects" (Roger Edmonds); "Bridging Studies: An Alternative Pathway to University for Rural Australians" (Bronwyn Ellis, Nancy Cooper, Janet Sawyer); "Regional University Access: A Case Study from the South West" (Robyn Eversole); "Vocational Education: Voices from the Field" (Annette Green, Colin Boylan); "A Foot in Both Camps: School Students and Workplaces" (Annette Green, Erica Smith); "A Rural-Based Teacher Education Internship: Stressors and Coping Mechanisms" (Tania Hockley, Brian Hemmings); "Online Support for Action Research in a Teacher Education Internship in Rural Australia" (T. W. Maxwell, Jo-Anne Reid, Catherine McLoughlin, Catherine Clarke, Ruth Nicholls); and "An Innovative Flexible Program for Rural Women" (Judith Wooller, Lesley Warner). Other (non-refereed) papers and panels were presented by April M. Bender, Judith Duff, Stephanie Gadeke, Lyn Gorman, Tamara Jones, Sheila King, Felicity Masson, Louise Pritchard, Sherrin Bell, Rosa Lincoln, Jan Martin, John McMillan, Harry Jones, David McSwan, Emma Clinch, Ron Store, Don Squires, R. J. Wenzel, and Russell Yates. Topics include motivating indigenous children, improving outcomes for high-risk students in Port Hedlund School of the Air, online teaching and resources, teacher perceptions of teaching in changing times, preservice teacher preparation for rural schools, recruiting quality student teachers for rural western Australia, school governance in small rural New Zealand schools, rotor streaming media software, otitis media, VET provision in rural schools, case study of small rural New Zealand schools, and flexible

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learning applied to primary teacher education. (SV)

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SPERA

17th
NATIONAL CONFERENCE
2001

Conference Proceedings

Providing Quality Education and Training For Rural Australians

Edited by
Brian Hemmings and Colin Boylan

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Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia

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SPERA

17th NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2001

Conference Proceedings

Providing Quality Education and Training For Rural Australians

Edited by
Brian Hemmings and Colin Boylan

Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia

3

Providing Quality Education and Training for Rural Australians.
Proceedings of 17th National Conference.

Edited by Brian Hemmings and Colin Boylan
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Mission and Goals

Mission

The Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia Incorporated (SPERA) links people with a diverse range of interests in education and training to promote the development of rural Australia by:

- promoting a positive view of education in rural areas and encouraging innovation and initiative in the provision of rural education services; and
- providing a framework for the sharing of concerns, issues and experiences relating to education and training in rural areas.

Goals

SPERA advances the education and training opportunities for all people in rural Australia by:

- promoting State and regional delivery systems which bring about efficient and effective education for people in rural areas;
- encouraging both the collection and sharing of relevant information on the provision of education in rural areas;
- conducting an annual National Conference to exchange ideas and information about education and training in rural education; and
- serving as a national advocate representing rural education and training.

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Colin MURDOCH – 39 Mallee Street, Leigh Creek SA 5731

Anne NAPOLITANO – PO Box 157, Mt Magnet WA 6638

"Providing Quality Education and Training for Rural Australians"

Welcome from Conference Convenor

On behalf of the Conference planning committee, I am delighted to welcome you to Wagga Wagga and the Riverina Region of New South Wales for this important Conference on providing quality education and training for rural Australians.

I am confident that you will learn a lot about the exciting and innovative programs being developed to enhance education and training in rural Australia over the next three days. As well, I am sure that you will enjoy the social activities planned for the Conference.

Major conferences require the support of sponsors. We are grateful for those organisations and companies that have provided sponsorship for our 17th National Conference.

All of us participating in this National Conference have a shared commitment and vision for rural education and training. I invite you to actively participate in the Conference so that we can all share our experiences and expertise.

Once more, welcome to Wagga Wagga and the 17th National SPERA Conference.

Colin Boylan
Conference Convenor

Conference Theme

"Providing Quality Education and Training for Rural Australians" will focus on four key components. Each component contributes to the overall focus of the Conference.

Key Components

VET in Rural Schools: the innovative ways in which rural schools are providing vocational education and training programs to their students.

Small Schools: providing quality learning experiences for rural students.

Flexible Delivery: using innovative strategies and delivery systems for rural Australians.

Rural Community Development: the community as the resource and support for education and training programs.

Conference Venue

The 17th National SPERA Conference is held in the Wagga Wagga RSL Club.

Message from the National President of the SPERA

Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia

On behalf of SPERA I am delighted to welcome you to our 17th national conference. Our national conference is the highlight of the year for SPERA and vitally important as we collectively celebrate the achievements of rural education and focus on meeting the challenges we face.

It is terrific to be in Wagga Wagga for the 2001 conference. As one of Australia's leading regional cities Wagga Wagga is a very appropriate venue for our conference. Wagga Wagga is also known throughout Australia for the number of national and international sportsman produced in the area.

A conference in a region renowned for excellence sits very comfortably with a conference aiming at focussing on how high quality innovative educational programs are making a difference throughout rural Australia.

One of the features of a SPERA conference that always sets it apart is the warm and friendly atmosphere created by a committed group of educators sharing excellent practice across rural Australia. Whilst we may not experience too much warmth in the weather in Wagga Wagga, I am confident that the traditional SPERA atmosphere will prevail and that old friendships will be renewed, and new friendships formed.

Having convened major conferences, I am only too aware of the enormous commitment of our Conference Convenor, Colin Boylan, and his team. Thank you to all involved for your tireless efforts to provide us with a further opportunity to celebrate rural education.

I look forward to meeting all delegates over the next few days and I trust the 17th national SPERA conference will provide you with professional stimulation and memories that will last for many years to come.

Ian McKay
President

Conference Planning Committee

The Conference Planning Committee for this Wagga Wagga SPERA Conference consisted of five members. The planning for the Keynote presentations, scheduling of presentations and the social program have occupied much of the committee's activities since the last conference in July 2000.

The Conference Planning Committee consisted of:

Dr Colin Boylan – Conference Convenor
Senior Lecturer in Education, Charles Sturt University
National Executive SPERA

Ms Ros Brennan
Lecturer in Vocational Education, Charles Sturt University

Mrs Annette Green
Lecturer in Vocational Education, Charles Sturt University

Dr Brian Hemmings
Senior Lecturer in Education, Charles Sturt University

Mr Keith Wheeler
Principal, Kooringal Public School
Wagga Wagga

The Conference Planning Committee wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance of:

Jo Thomas
Helen Sheridan
Judy Geeves
Wendy McCarthy
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Louise Doyle

And the support of the staff at:

School of Education, Charles Sturt University
Wagga Wagga RSL Club
Kooringal Public School
Classic Motoring Club, Wagga Wagga

The Planning Committee gratefully acknowledges the support for the Conference from:

NSW Department of Education and Training, Wagga Wagga District Office
Wagga Wagga Visitors Information Centre
Pearson Education

Refereed Conference Papers

For the 2001 SPERA Conference, presenters were able to have their paper peer reviewed by two people. A total of 13 papers was submitted with 1 keynote address and 9 conference papers being accepted for inclusion in the Conference Program and Conference Proceedings.

The Review Committee for the 2001 Conference consisted of the following members:

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Conference Convenor
Charles Sturt University
Wagga Wagga, NSW 2678

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Director
Rural Education and Research Development Centre
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NSW Department of Education and Training
Bathurst, NSW

Mr William Letts
Faculty of Education
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst, NSW

Refereeing of Papers

For Australian presenters, conference papers may be refereed to comply with the requirements for DETYA E1 Conference Paper status.

All papers submitted for inclusion in the refereed papers section of the Conference proceedings were double blind peer reviewed by members of the international reviewer's panel. The deadline for requests for a paper to be refereed was Monday 26 March 2001. The deadline submission date for an electronic copy of your full paper for refereeing was 30 April 2001.

The details of the successful peer reviewed conference papers are listed below.

1. **Coombe, K. and Lubawy, J.** Learning partnerships in rural early childhood settings.
2. **Edmonds, R.** Cut your teeth on online collaborative projects.
3. **Ellis, B. et al.** Bridging studies: An alternative pathway to university for rural Australians.
4. **Eversole, R.** Regional university access: A case study from the South-West.
5. **Green, A. and Boylan, C.** Vocational education: Voices from the field.
6. **Green, A. and Smith, E.** A foot in both camps: School students and workplaces.
7. **Hockley, T. and Hemmings, B.** A rural-based teacher education internship: Stressors and coping mechanisms.
8. **Maxwell, T. et al.** Online support for action research in a teacher education internship in rural Australia.
9. **Wooller, J. and Warner, L.** An innovative flexible program for rural women.
10. **Trent, F.** What about the aliens in the classroom? (keynote address)

SPERA History

SPERA emerged from a New South Wales in-service activity organised by Marie Dale in 1984

The activity brought together Marie Dale and Bob Meyenn, then Lecturer in Education at Riverina CAE, and the pair went on to organise a National Conference on rural education, which was held in Armidale, New South Wales in 1985. At this Conference, SPERA was endorsed as a national organisation and Marie became its foundation president.

Concerned by the effect the 'disadvantaged' label was having on rural communities, Marie and Bob saw the need to establish a national organisation which would advance the positive aspects of rural life and rural education and celebrate the unique features of rural education.

Around the time SPERA formed, CAP and DSP had been operating some ten years and rural communities were becoming conditioned to accept the 'disadvantaged' label in order to attract funds. It concerned Marie that these communities were locking themselves into such a negative mind set.

SPERA is an organisation which celebrates the 'doers' in rural education and has promoted many wonderful examples of education excellence in schools, TAFE, universities, adult and agricultural education at its national conferences over the last 12 years.

Its leadership has been shared by community people, adult educators, academics and school administrators from New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and more recently Western Australia.

In 1991 SPERA published a journal, *Education in Rural Australia* with Colin Boylan as its editor.

In its 10th year, SPERA launched the Australian Rural Education Award to acknowledge education achievements in rural Australia and celebrates SPERA's commitment to advance the positive aspects of living, working and being education in a rural community.

In 2000, SPERA together with the Australasian Association of Distance Education Schools held their 16th National Conference in Cairns, North Queensland.

This year, 2001, SPERA is holding its 17th National Conference in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. This is the first time SPERA has held its annual National Conference in Wagga Wagga, yet its origins are closely linked to Wagga Wagga and the education providers in Wagga Wagga. The theme for this year's conference is: ***"Providing Quality Education and Training for Rural Australians'.***

Past Conference Proceedings

A valuable source of information on developments and the provision of education in rural Australia is available through the collection of papers written by many people which have been presented at past SPERA Conferences. The writers provide insights into the types of innovative services and programs which have been developed by individuals, communities and institutions to promote the provision of education services in rural Australia.

WORKING TOGETHER – RURAL COMMUNITIES AND EDUCATION
1987 CONFERENCE Edited by Dr Don Reeves

RURAL COMMUNITIES DETERMINING THEIR FUTURE
1988 CONFERENCE Edited by Dr Don Reeves

THE FAMILY AND EDUCATION IN RURAL AUSTRALIA
1989 CONFERENCE Edited by Colin Boylan

WHAT DOES SOCIAL JUSTICE MEAN FOR EDUCATION IN RURAL AUSTRALIA?
1990 CONFERENCE Edited by Colin Boylan

TOWARDS 2000: SCHOOLING THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION
1993 CONFERENCE Edited by Dan Riley

THE RURAL COMMUNITY AND ITS SCHOOL: IN PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE
1994 CONFERENCE Edited by Dan Riley

LIFELONG LEARNING IN RURAL AREAS: BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE
1995 CONFERENCE Edited by Dan Riley

RURAL EDUCATION: QUALITY PROVISION, QUALITY EXPERIENCES, QUALITY OUTCOMES
1996 CONFERENCE Edited by Colin Boylan and Peter d'Plesse

CELEBRATING RURAL EDUCATION
1997 CONFERENCE Edited by Colin Murdoch and Giovanna Wood

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS ENABLING RURAL ACHIEVEMENTS: LEARNING FROM THE HEART CONFERENCE
1998 CONFERENCE Edited by Cheryl Shepperd and Oriel Hawke

RURAL EDUCATION: MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD
1999 CONFERENCE Edited by Rosa Lincoln

DAWNING OF OPPORTUNITY
2000 CONFERENCE Edited by Sheila King

Copies of the 1987-1991 Proceedings can be purchased for $25.00 per copy. The cost of the 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2001 Proceedings is $35.00. The cost of the 1993 Proceedings is $58.00. The cost of the 2000 Proceedings has yet to be determined.
Please make cheques payable to SPERA Inc and the order to:

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VET in rural schools

Mike Frost
(Department of Education, Tasmania)

Abstract

Despite the enduring problems of equity and access in the delivery of education in rural schools, vocational education and training programs appear to have had a significant impact on many such schools and their communities. Indeed, there is a deal of evidence to suggest that rural VET programs have been instrumental in the rejuvenation of communities, in addressing often chronic youth unemployment, and in confirming the role of the local school as a significant community resource.

The address will highlight how rural VET in Schools programs have been designed and implemented and the kinds of outcomes being experienced by young people. It will draw on a range of exemplars from around Australia across a range of industry areas. It will also highlight how schools and their communities have responded to the factors of isolation and limited workplacements, including particularly creative solutions in some indigenous rural communities.

The presentation will also suggest how enterprise and vocational education programs can become a significant feature in rural and regional development, can contribute to the recognition of the value of developing a culture and practice that embraces skills training, and can assist in better engaging young people in the world beyond.

There is a message of hope here for rural communities who have experienced the loss of services and general decline, particularly where they can recognise the full potential value of their young people.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

I have a particular interest in rural education and in the life of rural communities. I spent some time in my childhood about one hundred and fifty kilometres from here, near Bookham. Indeed my early experience of education was as a correspondence student of Blackfriars in Sydney. Now the 1956 version of Distance Education was quite a bit different to that in 2001. A weekly package of materials arrived, under the conscientious though authoritarian tutelage of my mother, tasks essentially restricted to the three Rs were completed, and the package dutifully returned. Media encounters were restricted to ABC Radio's *Kindergarten of the Air,* and *Let's Join In* and in the evenings *The Argonauts Club* reigned supreme. Occasional human interaction occurred when I was discovered daydreaming instead of doing my arithmetic, and the ultimate crime was committed when I left my desk having been distracted by my father passing by with a flock of sheep, or because I believed my young brothers were being threatened by a red-bellied black snake!

Actually it wasn't all that bleak. I developed a great fondness for my Blackfriars teachers, and eagerly awaited the return of my work to read their comments. Once I went and met one on a trip to Sydney, and was re-assured to find that the real life person was every bit as kindly as the one that existed in my imagination.

The relative isolation of life in rural NSW paled into insignificance when my family eventually moved to Flinders Island in the middle of Bass Strait. My father became a War Service Land Settler, and we lived on a farm developed from reclaimed swamp land. While Flinders Island had an area school, by the age of 11 I had passed a selection test to attend high school in Launceston. We travelled backwards and forwards by DC3, and with students from the Tasmanian West Coast towns of Rosebery and Zeehan, and from King Island, we were effectively cut off from our families for the entire term. For most of my high school life I despaired. I missed my family and farm life including friends who elected to remain on the island.

Things have probably not changed all that much. Young people in rural and regional Australia are still faced with the prospect of leaving their families and communities to attend high school, university and TAFE. Their experiences, as a deal of research over the years suggests, are not dissimilar to my own. They experience disengagement from family and community life, peer relationships are damaged, considerable effort is expended in establishing new friendship networks and the quality of what would once have been family life is diminished in boarding school and hostel arrangements. Families and local communities also suffer with the loss of family members, and depletion of the rural youth cohort.

When the decline over the last 50 years in economic and business activity in rural communities, and the decline in rural population as employment activity decreases are factored in, then the dislocation caused by young people leaving adds a further dimension to the crisis facing many rural communities around Australia. The fact that successive governments, both State and Federal, have done little to intervene in this process of rural decline is in itself a tragedy, although recent recognition in, for instance, the *Report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce* (2001) on the situation facing young people in urban and rural communities and what needs to be done, signals changes may be afoot.

A short history of VET

From 1996 until 2000 I worked as the Executive Officer for the Vocational Education and Training Network or VETNETwork, a national body set up to support teachers and trainers involved in establishing and running vocational education and training programs in schools. Inevitably quite a deal of my work involved identifying and promoting instances of innovative and transferable programs from around the country. On reflection, a surprising number of outstanding, VET in schools programs occurred in rural communities, and were regularly reported on in the national newsletter, *The Vetnetworker*.

Many of these programs demonstrated highly imaginative solutions to the range of problems experienced by rural schools, families and communities, particularly those faced with declines in services, out-migration, the tyranny of distance and limited access to new technology, including communications technology. Some of the initiatives generated incidental, almost accidental outcomes, others unleashed new synergies as stakeholders began to work together, others unleashed formidable political and social forces as local, state and federal government agencies were goaded into action.

At the heart of all of these programs was, however, a thing called structured workplace learning. VET in Schools has, as its origins, several principal policy initiatives. The first derives from the release of the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System Report, chaired by former trade union leader and luminary, Laurie Carmichael in 1992. This recommended, amongst other things, the broadening of the year 11 and 12 curriculum to embrace vocational education subjects, and the use of 'structured work experience'. The Carmichael Report subsequently became the vehicle for the delivery of a wide range of pilot programs that encouraged expansion of school, training and employment pathways, including the use of workplace training and first suggested the place for school-based traineeships.

The Carmichael recommendations and targets certainly informed the Keating government's 1994 White Paper, *Working Nation,* which looked to expand and support the participation of young people in joint school-industry programs with the establishment of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation. The ASTF had, as one of its key goals, the expansion of structured workplace learning so that school-industry partnerships would evolve as a mechanism for expanding the range of pathways available for young people into training and employment.

There is little doubt that the significant place that structured workplace learning assumed in these early policy efforts derived from the work of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in establishing Training for Retail and Commerce or TRAC programs in the early 90s. Indeed during the life of the ASTF, much of the funding for innovative vocational programs centred on expanding the opportunities for young people to spend quality time in workplaces.

TRAC was an initiative hammered out with industry and which rested on several, broad, operational principles. These included the notion of students spending one day a week in the workplace undertaking negotiated skills acquisition, with arranged supervision and assessment of skills via an approved skills list. Industry areas were initially restricted to retailing, commerce or clerical and automotive. On the job learning was expected to be supplemented by appropriate school-based programs, and schools and participating business and industry were expected to contribute equitably, in-kind and financially.

TRAC's successes were mixed. In Tasmania and Western Australia the principle of one day a week workplace learning, extended to the AVTS limit of 240 hours maximum for unpaid on-the-job training or 30 days a year, became virtual benchmarks. In Victoria and NSW dual accredited programs involving TAFE and with little workplace training, restricted the take-up of TRAC to rural centres like the

Hunter Valley, Maitland and Junee in NSW, and kept it out of Victoria almost entirely. TRAC appeared to flourish where local school-industry partnerships determined the need for a program offering sustained workplace training time, and where particular personalities urged take-up. Elsewhere there was at times entrenched resistance from department of education and board of studies operatives who saw TRAC as a high-cost, low participation model with serious limitations on access and equity.

The work of the ASTF, now re-badged as the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) has undoubtedly been responsible for raising the profile of structured workplace learning. From its establishment in 1995 it has gone on to directly support local, systemic and cross-sectoral programs in all states via innovation and support funding, research, publicity and project initiation. Much of its strategic research effort has gone toward tracking the growth in the use of structured workplace learning. Indeed this has become a central focus for its primary work, at the expense of a wider consideration of VET in schools.

VET in schools

Can I pause for a moment and share with you an experience that confirmed for me, in the clearest possible way, the power of industry-based programs to seriously enhance the life opportunities of young people. In 1993 I taught a young woman – let's call her Kaylene - in a subject called Social Psychology. Kaylene was in Year 11, at Rosny College, and came from a local high school in a deprived socioeconomic area. Her school performance had been mediocre, her attendance poor, and her experience of school generally pretty negative. She certainly didn't want to be at college, the likelihood of her getting a job of any description was low, and she could make no link between school achievement and employability. In class, when she turned up, she was sultry, disinterested and disengaged. Occasionally she came to life when we talked about deviant adolescent behaviour or child development. She wore track pants and oversize tops, she slouched in her seat, and she confirmed in every possible way that she did not want to be at school.

The year finished, she disappeared well before the end, as I recall, and I promptly forgot about her. Until, one day I walked past a local pre-Harvey Norman kind of store selling home furnishings, furniture, electrical goods and the like. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed movement in one of the large shopfront windows. I paused and looked at the young women who was adding the final touches to a most beautiful display. I looked more closely at the architect of this display, sensing something familiar. The perfectly groomed, impeccably dressed, stylish young woman seemed at first appearance one of the professional, artistic designers that big stores use, until she made eye contact and smiled. It was Kaylene!

Kaylene's transformation came through her participation in a TRAC Retailing program. She was actually on a workplacement, and as it turned out so impressed were the store manager and her on-the-job supervisor, that they gave her carte blanche to do the window display. Kaylene was a different person. Her attitude to college had changed, she was far more positive about all aspects of her program, she was clear about seeking a career in retail, she was far more mature, composed, even her confidence in speaking had matured. Little surprise then, that at the end of the year, she had developed a competitive edge in retailing to the point where she won a traineeship against 40 other applicants.

This is not a unique story. Most VET teachers and coordinators around the country will tell you similar ones. Often they will involve parents and teachers who also have been swept along by the momentum of workplace learning and what it can unleash. They often involve marginalised young people, kids whose experience of schooling has been unsatisfactory but who respond well to the adult learning experiences provided in workplaces and the way successful skills acquisition is handled and acknowledged.

a. Emergence of VET in schools

It seems likely that the current, national concept of VET in Schools began to emerge with ANTA funding of state programs beginning in 1996. By 1998 state and federal ministers through MCEETYA had agreed to recognise school-based programs that delivered recognised competencies under the National Training Framework as VET in schools. There appear to be three broad types of VET in schools arrangement, although variations and permutations within each type are extensive. According to the CEET Stocktake (2001) these are:

1. VET in Schools programs with nationally accredited training delivered across a continuum from fully at school to up to 30 days a year of structured workplace learning. This is unpaid training and does not involve any contractual arrangement, the training outcome usually being recognised in Board of Studies certification processes. Schools tend to assume prime responsibility for all facets of assessment, including on-the-job.

2. School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, where students actually engage in a contract involving paid training with the equivalent of one or more days a week being spent in a conventional employer-trainee relationship on the job. These are primarily delivered as traineeships, although apprenticeships in traditional trade areas like automotive, metals and engineering and building and construction are becoming more common , particularly in rural and regional areas.

3. Vocational Learning programs representing a wide range of enterprise, career, work experience, simulation and key competency programs which are frequently built on traditional curriculum areas and have limited workplace experience. They characterise much of the work that has been undertaken in expanding vocational programs into years 9 and 10 in particular.

In addition it seems that a significant proportion of young people gain workplace experience through part-time work, with an estimated 30% to 40% of students engaging in this kind of activity. There has also been some effort to recognise the training that occurs in such arrangements both through recognition of current competency initiatives, and through formal links between schools and local industry.

b. Growth in VET in schools

By 1999 the number of senior secondary students participating in VET in schools programs nationally had reached 130 000, up from 60 000 in 1996 and 26 000 in 1995. By any measure this is an extraordinary growth – indeed on 1998 figures 37% of Year 11 and 12 students in government schools were undertaking some form of

VET in schools programs, and furthermore nearly 60% of them included a workplace learning component. (CEET, 2001, p. 83). In 1999 of 402 429 students nationally in Year's 11 and 12 138 379 were undertaking VET in schools programs (ECEF, 2001). That is nearly 35% of students were undertaking VET programs.

There are some interesting qualitative details now beginning to emerge from this general growth in VET in schools. In summary these can be identified as:

- a trend that sees government schools leading catholic and independent schools in proportions of students doing VET programs;
- less than 50% of schools nationally undertake any kind of structured workplace learning;
- there are significant variations between states in terms of the numbers of students participating in VET in schools programs, with NSW claiming 53% enrolment in VET programs while Victoria and Western Australia had the lowest at 15% respectively (CEET op cit);
- there are even greater variations in the amount of time spent undertaking structured workplace learning. In Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania certainly all VET students in government schools undertake workplacements, with a significant proportion of catholic and independent students doing the same. However NSW has the lowest level with 38% of VET in schools students undertaking structured workplace learning; and
- while VET in schools programs do not appear to have attracted new students in Years 11 and 12 generally, they do appear to have contributed to halting what would have almost certainly been a decline in retention.

There are also some interesting trends affecting rural and regional students undertaking VET in schools programs. VET in schools programs, with a component of structured workplace learning, appear to be over represented by students from regional, rural or remote locations (Fullarton, 1999). A similar trend has been detected in the observation that structured workplace learning programs are found more frequently in low socio-economic areas, particularly in regional urban centres.

Certainly the uptake of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships is far more common in rural areas than urban.

Why rural VET?

Traditionally rural areas have experienced a generally lower retention rate into the post-compulsory years, so that schools have been open to new and innovative strategies to try and retain students. Often these initiatives have been supported by state and federal programs, like the participation and equity programs of the 1980's and the VET in schools programs of the 1990s.

Rural students have also, traditionally, faced the dilemma of leaving their families and schools to commute to or attend city or regional centre schools, particularly if they are perceived to have academic or higher education potential. Schools, as a result, are often left with depleted numbers in years 11 and 12, with the consequent effect on the provision of an attractive or useful program. Those who remain behind very often do so only as long as it takes to persuade parents and teachers that they wish to leave.

The appeal of VET in schools programs in rural schools is grounded in the essentially practical nature and utilitarian nature of them, and in the fact that they are directly perceived to be capable of improving employment opportunities. Historically rural schools have drawn from local industry and agricultural and pastoral enterprise for elements of their programs. In some states the residual links with a past where rural endeavour was more highly valued can be seen in the last remaining agricultural high schools. Since many VET in schools programs have a practical component expressed through structured workplace learning, the appeal for rural students is axiomatic. Confirmation of this comes from the success of school-based apprenticeship and traineeship programs in rural and regional areas, where one or more days a week are spent in the workplace, undertaking paid training. Queensland rural schools have led the nation in the take-up of such traineeships and apprenticeships, where in 1999 upwards of 3 000 mainly traineeships were in place. At the end of the first quarter in 2001, there were 428 school-based apprentices under contract and 2 138 school-based trainees (Department of Employment and Training website). By comparison, in Tasmania for the same period there were less than 20 trainees and no school-based apprenticeships.

The success of VET programs in rural schools, however, is deserving of deeper consideration because there is evidence to suggest that the ramifications will flow well beyond the local school and the standard measures of school performance. I would like to look at a number of case studies which will illuminate particular aspects of this, including the view that school-based VET can substantially contribute to community and regional development, can impact on patterns of employment and economic activity, can affect adult attitudes to learning and can favourably influence cultural activity.

Community development

In the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce *Footprints To The Future* a clear message emerges about the need for communities to be supported in making better provision for their young people. Recommendations from the report centre on ways of bringing together employers, community agencies, government departments, religious groups, and schools to improve education and training opportunities, and bring coherence to support agencies. In Tasmania an innovative series of partnerships have been struck between a number of local rural councils and the State government to better assist processes for community development. And, as mentioned earlier, the Cape York Partnership is built on a similar notion of mutual support.

There have been a number of notable initiatives in rural Australia that have as their inspiration, a range of vocational education and training program that successfully brought the school into contact with its community in a variety of ways. In all of these it seems to be from the relationships developed between students and local business people, supplemented by the activities of support bodies like school-industry partnership committees that drive wider community development. I would like to share with you several of these initiatives, which I became aware of through my previous work with VETNETwork. They display features which I believe can be replicated elsewhere but which seem significant contributors to a profound recognition of young people as a major community resource.

a. Junee High School

I first heard about Junee High School's TRAC program in 1996 and was struck by the vision that was being developed. Junee had been a town in some decline through changes in the pattern of national rail transport and the decline in the significance of agriculture. Junee High School, like schools in many rural and regional areas of Australia, reflected the general decline of its hinterland. In establishing TRAC in 1993, Junee High School sought to provide a program that would both improve Year 11 and 12 retention, while assisting transition from school to employment and further education.

Its program was not overly ambitious, with VET programs in Retail, Hospitality Studies and Furnishings along with Industry Studies, Metals and Engineering and the generic Work Studies.

The TRAC model mandated particular requirements – a school-industry management committee, one day a week for participants in the workplace, real assessment of workplace and school-based learning, and specific guidelines for teachers and workplace supervisors. Support to run the program eventually came from local participating industries, later the Department of Education and the ASTF put resources into the program.

What appeared to set this program apart, however, was the way in which the local community, including the business community, responded. By actively involving strategic elements of the local community and key agencies, it acquired a highly credible profile with more than 60 local businesses becoming involved. Retention into Year 11 became virtually 100%, young people began finding local employment opportunities opening up as a result of structured work placement and much stronger links between local business, the community and the school. In fact there was some evidence that jobs were actually being created, because businesses could experience at first hand what employing a young person might be like.

In 2000 I had the opportunity to visit the school. Five years on, and with a new principal, Junee's VET program appeared to have stood the test of time well. The principal and co-ordinator were committed to the maintenance of the original one-day-a week structured workplace learning program, most Year 11 and 12 students were staying on, the local workplacements were well entrenched and there was wide community acknowledgment of the success of the program. More to the point, aspects of pedagogy had begun to inform other aspects of the work of the school, particularly in Year 9 and 10. An enterprising approach was emerging, expressed through work with at risk young people, where links with local youth support agencies were proving productive.

Junee's story is not unique. Country towns all over Australia report the same outcomes when schools, business and the community begin to work in partnership. However, the TRAC program, in requiring a commitment from all stakeholders, including responsibility for local resourcing, guaranteed that the commitment to improving the education and employment outcomes for young people was genuine.

b. Margaret River High School

Western Australia shares, with Tasmania, amongst other things a commitment to maximising the amount of time students undertaking VET should spend in the workplace. Most programs in WA schools spend upwards of 20 days a year sometimes more in the workplace. Margaret River High School confirmed for me, when I visited there in 1997, how placing young people locally in businesses has acted as a major stimulus in engaging community interests and involvement.

Margaret River High School's model of vocational education program has, as a centre piece, genuine community ownership. Brian Middleton, as chair of the local chapter of Rotary observed:

> *The Margaret River community saw as a major responsibility the need to create opportunities in terms of education, training and employment for its young people. The program at the high school has provided an avenue through which this can occur.*

Margaret River High School provides an interesting case where the local management committee has adopted a high profile role in supporting vocational education initiatives. Members visit students on-the-job to demonstrate support, businesses are recruited through networks like Rotary, promotional activities are planned and widespread community involvement is encouraged.

As Committee Chair John Garstone, a local owner of a metals and engineering firm, noted:

> *there is a lot of self-satisfaction and pleasure in seeing young people grow from cheeky, young students to more mature and purposeful people as a result of their time in the workplace. But we have also grown to appreciate how valuable a resource our young people are, not just in terms of recruitment for jobs, but for our whole community.*

This recognition of the value of young people as an asset to the local community is a powerful message, and may well lie at the heart of other successful rural communities. Local businesses are now moving from offering workplacements to providing traineeships - a local service station and a surfboard manufacturer have now used the program to offer traineeships to students. Part of this growing community awareness is reflected in local employers voluntarily undertaking Workplace Trainer Category 2 programs in order to meet workplace assessment requirements. An outcome is a far greater sense of awareness of the value of developing a workplace training culture within the business community.

Margaret River's programs do not differ a lot from VET programs in other rural schools. What the program does demonstrate, however, is how community development, particularly in terms of employment and training, can be assisted when its business community accepts a major role in the provision of training opportunities.

c. Willunga High School

At the 2000 ANTA Awards, the winner of the VET in Schools category was Willunga High School in South Australia. A rural high school, 50 km from Adelaide and adjacent to the McLaren Vale wine growing district, Willunga has captured the imagination of a great many proponents of both vocational education and enterprise-based activity because it owns and operates a successful vineyard.

Students are actively engaged in the production of high quality red wine, high quality white wine and olive oil. In addition they have more recently moved into the food processing industry accessing primary produce from the local area. Students now operate Waverley Park Business Enterprises and Enterprise Centre, a group of six businesses in winegrowing, catering, wood and metal products, including wine racks and gift boxes, olive-growing and event management of the annual Waverley Park Continuous Picnic.

Not surprisingly, the school has acquired a reputation for its entrepreneurial activity, so that it now has an established relationship with its local community where the school is a catalyst for change. This community leadership has certainly grown from Willunga's strong and committed partnerships with local business and industry, and has helped to increase regional employment opportunities as well as making it a major catalyst for change in the local community.

In a region with among the highest youth unemployment rates in South Australia, the school has achieved steadily climbing enrolments and impressive retention rates. Students now are offered part time traineeships and apprenticeships, they have an extensive structured workplace learning program and they also access business mentoring.

Willunga's 900 students are now working in a learning environment which has a major focus on real-world enterprise and the acquisition of a wide range of employment related skills. Students are given an enhanced understanding of what is available locally in terms of further education and training, as well as careers.

d. Goondiwindi State High School

There are a range of examples around the country where schools have locked onto specific regional industries, establishing close working partnerships with them, in the process expanding career awareness and facilitating school-to-work pathways. Toolooa High School in Gladstone in Queensland has pioneered school-based apprenticeships in metal fabrication and engineering due to the employment demand created by local heavy industries. Hobart College in Tasmania has developed a close synergy with the salmonoid industry, providing a range of entry-level and more advanced training opportunities, for the local industry.

Goondiwindi State High School in Queensland has a taken similar initiative by introducing a school based program to give students a first hand insight into careers in the cotton industry. The school has established a strong presence through its VET in schools programs in a region characterised by intensive agricultural and pastoral activity. With local support from the McIntyre Valley Cotton Growers Association, Westpac Agribusiness, Queensland Regional Business Advisory Service - Border Rivers and Goondiwindi Cotton, the program will further the school's strategic alliance with the cotton industry to increase employment opportunities for local school leavers.

An important part of this effort was to raise student awareness of the wide range of employment opportunities within the cotton industry which extend to associated industries such as classing, spinning, marketing and research and development. It also had the aim of expanding the prevailing view that rural industry employment is about farming. The cotton industry in fact provides evidence of opportunities across a rural industry and well beyond the farm gate.

The same sentiments lay behind the development of the *Kid Start Farms* program sponsored by food processor Golden Circle and designed to encourage the uptake of rural industry school-based traineeships and apprenticeships. Gary Clark, National Project Manager for Rural Skills Australia has observed that, out of this whole industry approaches:

> *There is a growing acceptance of rural industry VETIS (VET in Schools) within industry, the school system and RTOs, and there is a positive and perceptible change in culture towards training generally.* (Clark, 2000)

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships grew out of the earlier Carmichael Report recommendations, and were established by Federal and State Ministerial agreement in 1997 under the New Apprenticeships policy. By 2000 approximately 5 000 of them were in place, the bulk of them being in Queensland. They have been taken up more vigorously in states where VET in schools has not been able to provide substantial structured workplace training opportunity, and least where VET in schools is strongly established. In Tasmania, where a very well established school-based VET program has been in place for some years, there has been very limited uptake.

The Queensland delivery model for school-based apprenticeships is relatively simple and follows a pattern emerging elsewhere in Australia. Students participate in part-time paid work (on the job) for one or two days a week, undertake structured training (off the job) usually with a TAFE college or other Registered Training Organisation and attend school part-time for three to four days per week. School-based traineeships can be completed within the two years of senior schooling, giving students an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level II qualification while the school-based apprenticeships are commenced during Years 11 or 12 and are completed post-school.

a. Moura State High School

Moura, inland from the coastal city of Gladstone in Queensland and once a thriving community of 13,000, is a rural town in decline. With coal export prices falling and the mine faced with an uncertain future, as well as hard times on the land, Moura along with other rural communities has suffered real economical hardship.

Moura's business community, in association with the local school, began the process several years ago of strategically addressing the issues associated with decline. One of the solutions was seen in the application of school-based traineeships in key industry areas including retail, hospitality, office administration, service station operation, automotive underbody and rural. This provided a firm measure of the commitment of the community to securing its future economic viability through improving local training and employment opportunities for its young people.

Student trainees involved responded particularly favourably citing 'on the job' experience as complementing school-based work. Trainees valued the fact that they were paid, obviating the need for seeking part-time work, appreciated the care and effort employers showed in creating flexible training arrangements so that school was minimally disrupted and valued the mix of work while still retaining strong links with school.

VET in indigenous communities

There is a wealth of anecdotal and research evidence, now beginning to drive policy, that shows that young indigenous people respond particularly well to vocational education programs in schools and local communities. VET programs have been used with success in western NSW indigenous communities as an interventionist strategy to reduce drop-out rates amongst Year 8 and 9 students (Knipe, 1999). In the Northern Territory they have been used to provide an alternative pathway for students disengaged from conventional school experience through low levels of literacy and numeracy, inadequate and inexperienced teachers and the emergence of youth cultures which militate against regular school attendance (Bettison, 2000).

The place for education and training in indigenous community development is reflected in the partnership agreement established, for example, in the Cape York Partnerships initiative which brings the indigenous communities of the area and the Queensland Government into collaborative action to overcome social, health, economic and educational disadvantage.

a. Community-based partnerships: The Port Keats project

Port Keats is an isolated and disadvantaged NT community of 2 000, of which over 1 200 are under 25. The young men in the community were considered to be particularly at risk. Indeed in a report to a conference hosted as part of the Remote Communities Project, Br Terry Kingston observed the following:

"Among the young men (of Port Keats) a subculture is forming which is oriented toward simple existing: finding something to do each day, watching videos, roaming at night; and some gang formation. The majority of them have minimal contact with the world outside Port Keats and lack awareness of their own potential and the possibilities open to them".

Poor school enrolment and attendance is inevitably linked to over representation at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre. When the fact that English is spoken very much as a second language, the problems are compounded.

The Port Keats Project used a set of strategies to effectively build the role and place of the young men as valued members of the local community. A central feature of this was the hosting of a group of 12 young white men with 5 staff from a school in Ipswich. The Port Keats young men accepted responsibility for this hosting, the community responded by making available its aircraft, boats, putting on a Corroboree and a farewell feast. The outcomes from this have been a far more positive perception by the community of the young men, greater participation in community meetings and activities, and greater input into community –based projects and funding applications.

The reported outcomes from the project continue to impress. Giving the young men responsibility for acting as cultural guides and peer tutors empowered them and significantly increased their own sense of worth. In turn they become more responsive to the opportunities provided by the project for improving English, for attending and taking up the opportunities provided by school and a growing awareness of what vocational education has to offer.

The community has responded particularly well to the visible celebrations of success – the graduation ceremonies with their presentations and speeches are valued, particularly by parents. As Brother Terry Kingston observes:

> *More and more we recognise the need to work in with the wider community – the Council, CDEP, local industry. We cannot prepare the Kardu Kigay in isolation from the community and workplace. There is obvious support for the Kkardu Kigay from key personnel in the community.* (p. 32)

The social situation faced by the young men of Port Keats has been more widely recognised through the research undertaken by the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce and lies at the heart of much of the national effort at improving life chances of young, indigenous people. Vocational education and training has the clear potential to improve transition, increase employability, open up local business and employment opportunities and build success. In targeted training areas involving sport, culture, music and media there are some excellent developments involving young aboriginals.

b. Networked learning centres in Tasmania

While Tasmania is acknowledged generally for its VET system, the development of network of district high schools in rural areas across the state has produced an outstanding model of best practice, become a national leader in delivery of VET on-line learning, and a pioneer in creating new opportunities for rural communities.

Prior to 1996 only four Tasmanian rural schools accommodated post-compulsory students on site with limited academic programs. By 2001 80% of all rural high schools and district high schools had restructured their Year 11 and 12 programs to reflect the benefits of vocational based learning programs. These benefits have been identified as:

- increased student motivation;
- higher retention from Year 10 to 12 and particularly during year 11;
- greater community involvement in life long learning programs; and
- greater relevance of the learning program to future work opportunities.

At the heart of the initiative was the establishment of a series of Skill Centres, established with ANTA funding, in most of the more isolated communities. Associated with these were Community Access Centres, developed as part of a state government initiative to increase on-line access in these communities. The schools with an existing, if limited, capacity to offer vocational programs for training provided the essential training infrastructure, as well as access to specialist facilities like workshops, library resources and computers. Schools also were supported to become Registered Training Organisations with their scope of registration reflecting local community needs.

The rural districts were also supported by three regional VET officers particularly skilled in assisting to establish Year 11 and 12 VET and New Apprenticeship programs, generate work placements, source the training for work-place assessors, and develop pathways from years 9-12.

The outcomes from the establishment of these post-compulsory education and training facilities is striking. Students, often with poor literacy, numeracy, social and communication skills, who would have once been forced to continue with Year 11 and 12 programs in urban senior secondary colleges stay local, and stay at school. Participation by young, unemployed or under employed adults in VET programs has grown substantially, as has interest from older groups including parents of the Year 11 and 12 students. The range of options, particularly with increasing on-line delivery of VET programs, is enriching the learning and training opportunities for the community. In addition, local employers are becoming aware of the training opportunities, and are actively supporting and recruiting from the programs.

However it is the increased focus on the school as a centre of learning in the community that captures attention. The programs have assisted schools to enhance their viability and visibility in communities where the local population is static or declining. As well the emergence of a skilled workforce, locally available for rural industries and business is having a direct and beneficial effect on business activity, introducing more modern methods and encouraging the pursuit of new and external markets.

Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), in recognising the significance of schools for their local communities, refer to them being agencies in building social capital through their capacity to build networks and share expertise.

Conclusion

There is considerable interest in improving the opportunities of young people in rural and regional areas of the country.

The MCEETYA *Taskforce on Rural and Remote Education, Employment, Training and Children's Services* has been established to identify and report on "workable and potentially workable local collaborative strategies to improve employment, education, training and children's services in rural and remote Australia".

The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce has clearly identified the relatively unique situation often faced by young people in their capacity to access services, including education and training services.

The Commonwealth has made a major commitment to improving education, training, health and social services to indigenous communities, many of which are in the most remote fringes of the nation.

And state governments are making a much more sustained effort to work with all tiers of government, often through new and imaginative, partnership-based, to improve the quality of life in rural areas. It seems that the decline in the provision of services in country areas may now have reached an end point, and indeed recognition of the political volatility of rural electorates makes it likely that new lines of support will be provided.

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Why aligning curriculum and assessment in new times is ultimately a pedagogy question

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Abstract

In an era of local, school-based curriculum decision-making and the reliance on overarching frameworks for generic content and process as guidelines, curriculum selection is no longer straightforward. The link forged between teacher professionalism and local decision-making is dramatically changing the way Queensland schools interact with their local communities, other schools, and district and central offices. A corollary, however, may well be that the demise of the 'paint-by-numbers' teacher has caused more anxiety within the teaching profession than any other of the myriad strategic directions, innovations and programs introduced by Education Queensland in the last decade-and-a-half.

Making decisions about curriculum involves selections from an almost infinite set of possibilities, no matter what particular framework is used. The work of most teachers involves a delicate balancing act between identifying learning contexts that are appropriate to the local needs of a particular community and meeting statewide expectations and standards. How schools resolve this will clearly define the level of autonomy available to the individual teacher. Indeed, the impact of school-based management on the individual teacher's work in the classroom is becoming more and more about the bread and butter of teachers' working lives—curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The key question I discuss in this paper is: "To what extent can a centrally developed framework for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment ease the transition to locally generated and managed teaching and learning, allowing schools to differentiate on sound educational grounds?" Along the way, I discuss how, in making this transition, students need to be prepared with the skills and knowledges for 'new times'[1] (Hall & Jacques, 1990).

Alignment

One of the most cogent lessons learnt in recent years has been the importance of aligning the key message systems (Bernstein, 1990) of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in ways that optimise learning opportunities for all students. Recent innovations and initiatives throughout Australia (Herschell & Luxton, 2000) have tended to focus on each of these systems separately. That is, we see curriculum frameworks pulling in one direction, assessment approaches pulling in another, and pedagogy programs or professional development pulling in yet another. Luke (1999) likens this to a panel beater's delight—forcing teachers to "bash" often ill-fitting theoretical frameworks to fit the pragmatics of teaching 30 different young people on a daily basis.

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[1] A term coined here to describe the combined phenomena of globalisation, new and constantly changing technologies and a sense of uncertainty about the future.

In this context, the most likely winner is assessment, and at the expense of curriculum and pedagogy. This is natural and entirely understandable. While I am not suggesting that assessment completely drives curriculum choice and pedagogical practices, the opportunity for confusion and thus choosing the failsafe assessment option—when curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are out of alignment—is clearly increased, and further increases as the assessment stakes get higher.

An example in Queensland is the program for testing literacy and numeracy in Years 5 and 7. These tests are linked to the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks (Curriculum Corporation, 2000a & 2000b), and every student in Years 5 and 7 who attends a Queensland state school is tested (the tests are optional for students attending non-state schools). While the test-setters acknowledge that they can—and do—test only some aspects of literacy and numeracy, the high-stakes (Popham, 1987) nature of the tests causes a 'backwash effect' on the curriculum (Working Party on Tertiary Entrance, 1987). And so curriculum is built to maximise students' chances on the test, thus narrowing curriculum choices to those within the scope of the test.

In 2001, the question that must be asked is: "How does this provide the space for teachers and schools to differentiate?" *Queensland State Education 2010* (QSE 2010) (Education Queensland, 2000) emphasises the move from a 'one-size-fits-all' model for schools to a model that differentially responds to, and addresses the needs of, the local community on a school-by-school basis. In this situation, two options seem to present themselves. We either forego any attempt to differentiate curriculum and assessment altogether, and accept standardised versions of both, or change the approach to assessment so that it is broad enough to encompass the sort of learning outcomes desired by the school and the system. Both, of course, are fraught with danger when there is no systematic alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Education Queensland's response to these complex issues has been to develop the New Basics Framework. The New Basics is a framework for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that provides opportunities for students to develop the skills and knowledges to survive and flourish in changing economic, social and technological conditions. It is a differentiated framework that encourages schools to make curriculum choices, in negotiation with its community, while at the same raising the intellectual bar across the state.

There has been a great deal of public talk and myth-making about education for the future. The New Basics Project is the first educational renewal project in Australia to take up the full complexity of the challenge of preparing students for 2010 and beyond. The overall aim of the New Basics Project is to work with teachers and schools as they focus on their core business of teaching and learning, but to do so in a way that directly confronts the challenges of these dramatically changing times.

The framework has three conceptual pivots, each of which is essential for generating pedagogical change and improved student outcomes.

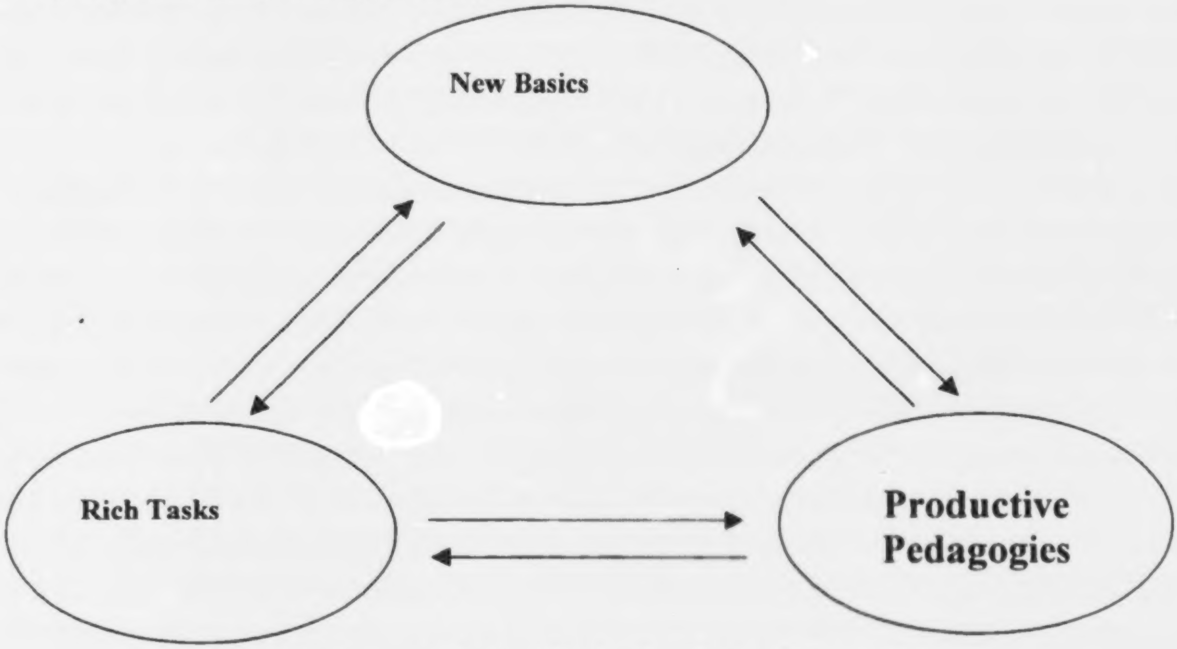

Figure 1: Conceptual pivots for the New Basics Framework

The alignment of these three areas underpins the New Basics Framework. In order to answer the questions raised thus far in this paper, we need to examine each of these areas and discuss its relationships with the other two.

The New Basics as curriculum organisers

The New Basics are futures-oriented categories for organising curriculum. Essentially, they are a way of managing the enormous increase in information resulting from globalisation and the rapid rate of change in the economic, technological, social and cultural dimensions of our existence.

The New Basics are clusters of essential practices that students need in order to flourish in new times. Apart from globalisation, contributors to new times include the shift towards local service-based economies, new and constantly changing technologies, complex transformations in cultural and social relationships, fluid demographics, and a sense of uncertainty about the future. At the same time, and specifically related to education, are the increasingly complicated and complex demands on teaching and assessment that have accompanied the diversification of classroom practices.

There are four New Basics categories and they have an explicit orientation towards researching, understanding, and coming to grips with the newly emerging economic, cultural and social conditions. These four clusters of practice are deemed to be essential for lifelong learning by the individual, for social cohesion, and for economic wellbeing, as described in QSE 2010.

As curriculum organisers, the New Basics aim to help schools, teachers and curriculum planners to move beyond a defence of *status quo* knowledges to a critical engagement with the ongoing change that characterises new times. The New Basics are predicated on the existence of mindful schools, where intellectual engagement and connectedness to the real world are persistent foci.

The four New Basics categories are:

1. Life pathways and social futures

Who am I and where am I going?

- Living in and preparing for diverse family relationships
- Collaborating with peers and others
- Maintaining health and care of self
- Learning about and preparing for new worlds of work
- Developing initiative and enterprise

2. Multiliteracies and communications media

How do I make sense of and communicate with the world?

- Blending traditional and new communications media
- Making creative judgments and engaging in performance
- Communicating using languages and intercultural understandings
- Mastering literacy and numeracy

3. Active citizenship

What are my rights and responsibilities in communities, cultures and economies?

- Interacting within local and global communities
- Operating within shifting cultural identities
- Understanding local and global economic forces
- Understanding the historical foundation of social movements and civic institutions

4. Environments and technologies

How do I describe, analyse and shape the world around me?

- Developing a scientific understanding of the world (and the universe)
- Working with design and engineering technologies
- Building and sustaining environments

Thus the New Basics categories capture various aspects of the person in the world:

- the individual—physically and mentally, at work and at play and as a meaning-maker;

- the communicator—active and passive, persuading and being persuaded, entertaining and being entertained, expressing ideas and emotions in words, numbers and pictures, creating and performing;
- the group member—in the family, in social groups, government-related groups, and so on;
- part of the physical world—of atoms and cells, electrons and chromosomes, animal, vegetable and mineral, observing, discovering, constructing and inventing.

On their own, however, the New Basics curriculum organisers have little potential to be taken up other than by a few zealots. As I suggested in the introduction, the development of a framework has more to do with the alignment of message systems than with the individual system itself. So, for example, if the above curriculum were not associated with assessment built directly from these organisers, then their impact on classroom practice would be greatly, and probably increasingly, diminished. In this sense we need to tie this curriculum to richer assessment tasks that serve three purposes, *viz.* that the assessment tasks:

- assess both the specifics and the overall intent of the curriculum;
- have currency;
- have public and educational validity.

The balance between school-based curriculum selection and statewide standards can only be achieved if these three areas are addressed systematically through the work we assess. Otherwise, we leave space for neither local curriculum content nor high-level standards.

Rich Tasks

The New Basics are 'transdisciplinary'; that is, they draw upon the discipline expertise of teachers and community members working collaboratively to ensure connectedness to the world and the way it works. This is essentially different from an interdisciplinary approach that expects teachers to be experts across a range of disciplines (or, sometimes, generalists specialising in none). The New Basics Framework closely aligns the assessable work of the students to the curriculum developed through the use of Rich Tasks.

Rich Tasks are the outward and visible signs of student engagement with the New Basics curriculum framework. They are the assessable and reportable outcomes of a 3-year curriculum plan that prepares students for the challenges of life in new times. Performances on the tasks are then assessed and reported to parents and the system at the end of Years 3, 6 and 9[2].

This is a reconceptualisation of the notion of *outcome* as a demonstration or display of mastery; that is, students are to display their understandings, knowledges and skills through performance on transdisciplinary activities that have an obvious connection to the wide world. The idea is that preparation for a Rich Task involves very detailed discipline input from a range of teachers, often well before the task is carried out. The Rich Task then provides a real-world context within which to extend, bring together and display high-level knowledge of various disciplines. No single Rich Task is to be completed by one teacher alone or within the four walls of one classroom. Rather it is a collaborative effort that has an end-point with validity in terms of its connectedness to the wide world.

Given Education Queensland's commitment to the principles of school differentiation and school-based management, it needs to be recognised that students moving into new communities will enter a Queensland state school that defines itself in terms of its local community's needs as well as state, national and international educational expectations. In this context it is essential that parents and the system acquire a detailed portfolio of student work and achievement.

The New Basics, through the Rich Tasks, aims to presents parents with the most elaborate portrait of student achievement over nine years of schooling ever attempted in Australia. The New Basics curriculum is a comprehensive set of organisers that, when associated with Rich Tasks and Productive Pedagogies, propel students towards learning outcomes for new times.

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[2] The complete set of Rich Tasks for Years 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9 is available at http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/html/trt.html

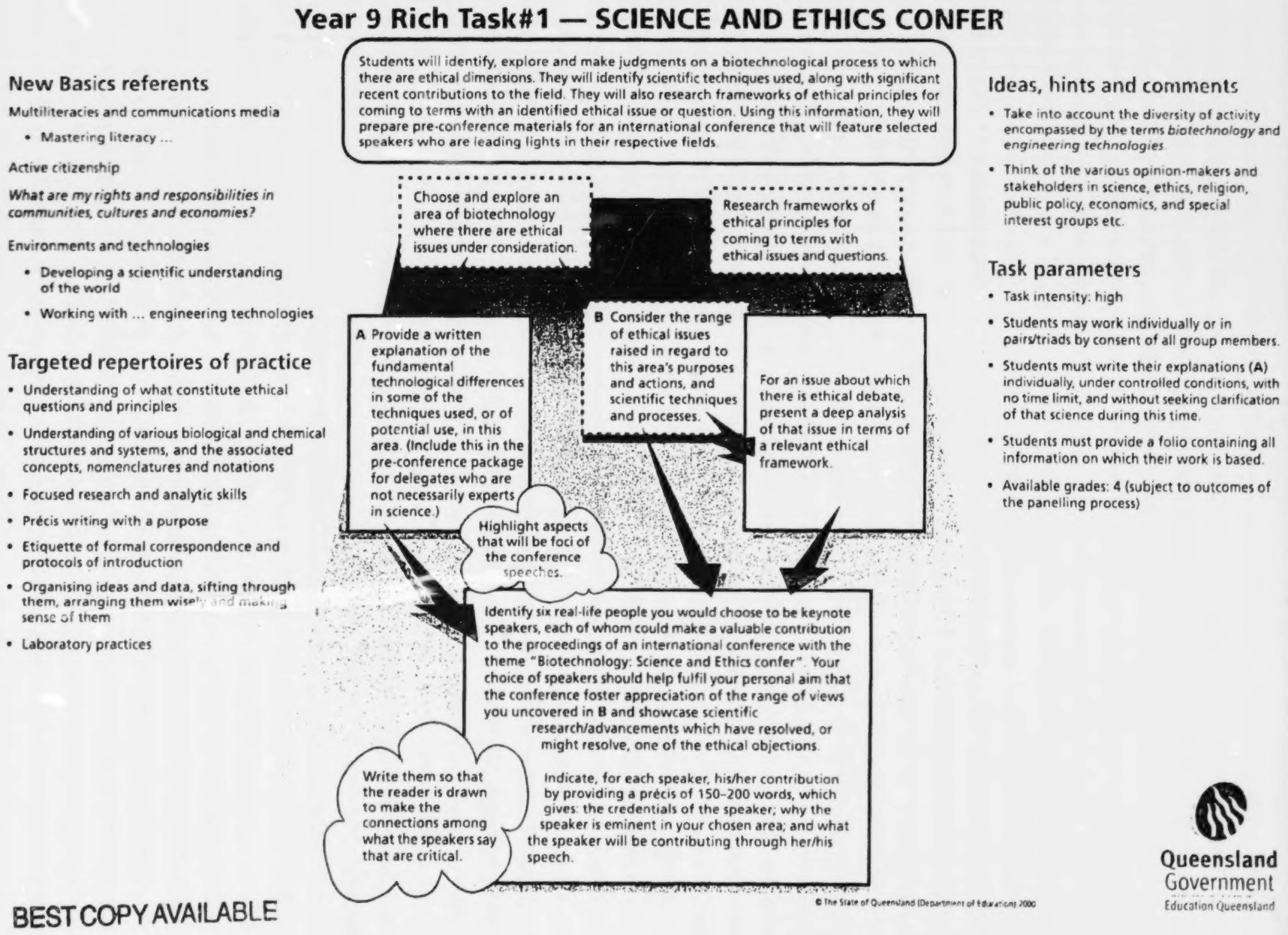
In this sense then, Rich Tasks, in conjunction with both the New Basics categories as curriculum organisers and with Productive Pedagogies, is Education Queensland's attempt to empower and encourage teachers, unclutter the curriculum, up the ante intellectually, deliver fewer alienated students, prepare students for a future in an uncertain world, and position the classroom within the global village.

The Rich Tasks require careful and considered curriculum planning to set the conditions for focused, purposive and connected teaching. The role of teachers here is to scaffold and enhance the actual learning and development that occur through and towards the Rich Tasks. This means that:

Teachers work backwards
from
whole, educationally meaningful, valuable tasks and goals
by
using their professional judgment
to
break them down into sequences of instruction
around
targeted repertoires of practice within various operational fields of knowledge.

Figure 2: What Rich Tasks mean for teachers

As can be seen from the exemplar below, the tasks provide the impetus for high-level curriculum planning and implementation while, at the same time, allowing teachers and students the freedom for expression of local cultures and contexts. The tasks are designed to be the hard-edged outcomes of three years of schooling. They make explicit the sorts of activities in which students are to have engaged. They invite teachers to use their imagination and expertise and to work collaboratively in designing learning experiences for their students. And they are the publicly accessible statements about the kinds of learnings that societies value and schools transmit.



Year 9 Rich Task#1 — SCIENCE AND ETHICS CONFER

New Basics referents

Multiliteracies and communications media

- Mastering literacy ...

Active citizenship

What are my rights and responsibilities in communities, cultures and economies?

Environments and technologies

- Developing a scientific understanding of the world
- Working with ... engineering technologies

Targeted repertoires of practice

- Understanding of what constitute ethical questions and principles
- Understanding of various biological and chemical structures and systems, and the associated concepts, nomenclatures and notations
- Focused research and analytic skills
- Précis writing with a purpose
- Etiquette of formal correspondence and protocols of introduction
- Organising ideas and data, sifting through them, arranging them wisely and making sense of them
- Laboratory practices

Students will identify, explore and make judgments on a biotechnological process to which there are ethical dimensions. They will identify scientific techniques used, along with significant recent contributions to the field. They will also research frameworks of ethical principles for coming to terms with an identified ethical issue or question. Using this information, they will prepare pre-conference materials for an international conference that will feature selected speakers who are leading lights in their respective fields.

Choose and explore an area of biotechnology where there are ethical issues under consideration.

Research frameworks of ethical principles for coming to terms with ethical issues and questions.

A Provide a written explanation of the fundamental technological differences in some of the techniques used, or of potential use, in this area. (Include this in the pre-conference package for delegates who are not necessarily experts in science.)

B Consider the range of ethical issues raised in regard to this area's purposes and actions, and scientific techniques and processes.

For an issue about which there is ethical debate, present a deep analysis of that issue in terms of a relevant ethical framework.

Highlight aspects that will be foci of the conference speeches.

Identify six real-life people you would choose to be keynote speakers, each of whom could make a valuable contribution to the proceedings of an international conference with the theme "Biotechnology: Science and Ethics confer". Your choice of speakers should help fulfil your personal aim that the conference foster appreciation of the range of views you uncovered in **B** and showcase scientific research/advancements which have resolved, or might resolve, one of the ethical objections.

Indicate, for each speaker, his/her contribution by providing a précis of 150–200 words, which gives: the credentials of the speaker; why the speaker is eminent in your chosen area; and what the speaker will be contributing through her/his speech.

Write them so that the reader is drawn to make the connections among what the speakers say that are critical.

Ideas, hints and comments

- Take into account the diversity of activity encompassed by the terms *biotechnology* and *engineering technologies*.
- Think of the various opinion-makers and stakeholders in science, ethics, religion, public policy, economics, and special interest groups etc.

Task parameters

- Task intensity: high
- Students may work individually or in pairs/triads by consent of all group members.
- Students must write their explanations **(A)** individually, under controlled conditions, with no time limit, and without seeking clarification of that science during this time.
- Students must provide a folio containing all information on which their work is based.
- Available grades: 4 (subject to outcomes of the panelling process)

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Figure 3: Rich Task #1 for Years 6–9, 2001–2003

It can also be seen from the exemplar above that there is the scope both to build locally relevant curriculum *and* to meet statewide standards of achievement.

Productive pedagogies

We now come to the heart of the matter: The New Basics Framework is essentially about pedagogy. Rich Tasks, when associated with the New Basics categories as curriculum organisers, are specifically designed to encourage and support pedagogical reform. But, in order to focus on pedagogy, teachers need the *space* to be able to extend and draw upon a range of teaching practices. Neither a narrow curriculum nor a crowded curriculum provides this space. In the first instance, teachers' pedagogical options are limited to the scope of the curriculum and assessment whereas, in the second, the demands for coverage provide limited space for deep intellectual engagement with the curriculum.

For many years, teachers, teacher educators and researchers have searched for 'correct' or universally effective approaches to teaching. Contenders have ranged from 'focused instructioni to 'constructivism' and 'integrated teaching'. Yet generations of teachers see such approaches come and go with variable effects. If there is one thing that the researchers on teaching over the last three decades would agree upon it is this: Different approaches to pedagogy have variable effects on teaching different things to different groups of students. However self-evident and mundane this might sound, it is an insight of value to the New Basics Project.

The School Reform Longitudinal Study (SRLS) (Luke, Ladwig, Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 1998) coined the term 'productive pedagogies' to describe the art of teaching as a broad repertoire of teacher strategies. The claim made in the New Basics Project is that teachers need an expanded and flexible array of strategies to employ in classroom teaching. They then need to be encouraged to make principled decisions about what strategies to deploy based on the curriculum to be taught and the backgrounds, styles, interests and capabilities of their students.

To complete the New Basics Framework triad, the New Basics defines pedagogical reform in terms of teachers' engagement with Productive Pedagogies—the collection of 20 teaching strategies (see later), and organised around four broad domains:

- intellectual engagement;
- relevance;
- supportive classroom environment; and
- recognition of difference.

These four domains are considered (Luke et al., 1998) to be the necessary, but not on their own, sufficient conditions for Productive Pedagogies.

Productive Pedagogies are classroom strategies that teachers can use to focus instruction and improve student outcomes. Of course, opportunities for professional development in these strategies need to be provided to support teachers' work in different professional combinations and with different groupings of students.
Some strategies are more suited for teaching certain knowledges and skills than are others. Therefore, when making use of Productive Pedagogies, teachers should:

- consider and understand the backgrounds and preferred learning styles of their students;
- identify repertoires of practice[3] and operational fields of knowledge to be targeted; and
- evaluate their own array of teaching strategies and select and apply the appropriate ones.

The following table identifies the major strategies within Productive Pedagogies and also lists focus questions that provide a basis for dialogue.

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[3] The cognitive and cultural, social and linguistic skills that students need to develop.

Table 1: Heuristics on categories of Productive Pedagogies

Strategy	Focus questions
Higher-order thinking	Are higher-order thinking and critical analysis occurring?
Deep knowledge	Does the lesson cover operational fields in any depth, detail or level of specificity?
Deep understanding	Do the work and response of the students provide evidence of depth of understanding of concepts or ideas?
Substantive conversation	Does classroom talk break out of the initiation/response/evaluation pattern and lead to sustained dialogue between students, and between teachers and students?
Knowledge problematic	Are students critiquing and second-guessing texts, ideas and knowledge?
Metalanguage	Are aspects of language, grammar and technical vocabulary being foregrounded?
Knowledge integration	Does the lesson range across diverse fields, disciplines and paradigms?
Background knowledge	Is there an attempt to connect with students' background knowledge?
Connectedness to the world	Do the lesson and the assigned work have any resemblance or connection to real-life contexts?
Problem-based curriculum	Is there a focus on identifying and solving intellectual and/or real-world problems?
Student control	Do students have any say in the pace, direction or outcomes of the lesson?
Social support	Is the classroom a socially supportive and positive environment?
Engagement	Are students engaged and on-task?
Explicit criteria	Are the criteria for judging student performance made explicit?
Self-regulation	Is the direction of student behavior implicit and self-regulatory or explicit?
Cultural knowledges	Are diverse cultural knowledges brought into play?
Inclusivity	Are deliberate attempts made to increase the participation of students of different backgrounds?
Narrative	Is the style of teaching principally narrative, or is it expository?
Group identity	Does the teaching build a sense of community and identity?
Citizenship	Are attempts made to foster active citizenship?

Source: School Reform Longitudinal Study (SRLS) Report, October 1999, p. 10

It has become clear that 'dumbing down' (McGaw, 1996) is essentially a pedagogy issue. As has been stated, unless there is a clear systemic focus on broadening the array of pedagogical practices then the scope and intellectual depth of the curriculum can only be dealt with superficially. Likewise, serious pedagogical reform can only be achieved if teachers have space to uncrowd the curriculum so that students study fewer things but in much greater depth. Within the New Basics Framework this is achieved through fewer but more connected curriculum organisers and fewer but deeper outcomes. This is why the components of the New Basics stand-alone. They are part of an interlocking triad of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. In the New Basics one of them cannot exist without the other two.

Some conclusions

I started this paper by suggesting that the relationships between school-based curriculum decision-making and generic frameworks were redefining the role of the teacher as professional. It is clear that it is also affecting the role of the school as part of a community and of central office as one of support. A major fear of school-based management in curriculum is that we run the risk of an intellectually impoverished curriculum for some schools. The linking of local content to statewide expectations as part of the New Basics Framework attempts to overcome this. The New Basics provides our education system with the opportunity to reconcile this longstanding barrier to educational reform in three ways:

First, it places the onus on the professional judgment of teachers. The teacher sets up the context for the learnings that culminate in a suite of Rich Tasks and has intimate knowledge of the students' learning experiences. Peer review of teacher judgments of the standard of student work on each Rich Task will occur before performance on tasks is reported to parents. Thus there is little incentive for teachers to dumb down the curriculum when student work is to be presented both to educators and, via public performance, to the general community.

Second, the role of a central office is redefined as being one of providing support to schools in implementing their locally initiated and managed curriculum. Clearly the Rich Tasks are meant to be difficult. A role of central office is to encourage and assist schools to translate the intellectual depth of Rich Tasks into locally appropriate curriculum selections leading to productive pedagogies. Although Rich Tasks on their own can be as open to dumbing down as can any other initiative, they exist to turn productive pedagogies into a reality in the classroom.

Third, the New Basics up the game intellectually and provide the pedagogical space for deep intellectual engagement. Interestingly, the productive pedagogies do not preclude direct, didactic teaching of specific skills and knowledges. In fact, this is one of an array of teaching practices that the framework tries to reclaim along with other more constructivist principles. The key is providing the space to utilise the array of practices in productive ways, thereby optimising learning opportunities for students.

Regardless of whether we focus on biotechnology or volcanoes, web pages or handwriting, there is still a question about how the curriculum selection articulates and broadens students' life pathways. The answer lies in a balance between developing local, community-based understandings of the immediate context and broadening the students' horizons in a targeted way that engages with the world as it changes.

At its heart, then, the New Basics Project is about renewing our work as educators, getting back to the basics of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, with a clear focus on improving student outcomes through increasing the intellectual rigour of their work. It is not a simplistic paint-by-numbers system, and it does not buy into the argument that lots of tests or lots of outcomes will solve the complex problems we face. Instead, it is based on a commitment to teachers' professionalism. It recognises their capacity for intellectual decision-making and their commitment to their students' personal and intellectual welfare.

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NB This paper draws upon the many publications of the Branch and therefore also contains the work of Ray Barrett, Neville Grace, Ken Gray, Ray Land, Allan Luke and Gabrielle Matters.

Swimming against the tide

Bob Meyenn
(Charles Sturt University)

I would like to showcase what is good about rural education in Australia. That's still this organisation's prime purpose and the reason that has kept it going as long as it has. I want to talk about the context in which we are operating in today. Our efforts in providing high quality education in rural Australia can't be divorced from the context in which we operate.

My son is a good example:

He was a kid growing up in regional rural Australia. In many ways school did not reward what he was good at. Until Year 11and 12 where he chose a vocational HSC he was disappointed by school. Years 11 and 12 were the two happiest years of his life at school. He was doing things he enjoyed and was interested in, and felt relevant to his life. I think that is one of the real challenges for us all and particularly challenges for our governments that we must maintain that breadth in curriculum offering, so that there is something there for every child. Every child is entitled to it no matter where his or her parents happen to live. Breadth of curriculum offers the range of options that all of our children should have this is something that we have to fight for and preserve.

The 80's and 90's have seen massive changes in government economic policies throughout the western world usually called 'economic rationalism', although that term seems to be going out of favour. Market forces and formula economics seem to be the more favoured terms at the moment. These policies were embraced whole heartily by the Keating/Hawke governments in Australia. This led to a massive privatisation of public assets and services. We've seen it in banking, in power generation, in airlines, airports. I think that we have got to look at this change in the economics of the provision of services very, very carefully because of the impact it has in a very sparsely populated continent like Australia. We are still one of the most highly urbanised nations in the world. This may not accord with our image, the outback bush image that we have, but we still have as a feature of our geography a very, very sparsely populated country.

When private companies take over these services and they become private rather than public assets, and to quote from Robert Mann's article in the Sydney Morning Herald earlier this year highlights this point. "Private companies are far less likely to agree to the kind of cross subsidisation of services provision in far flung rural Australia. This is the implicit social contract on which this country was built. Country Australians know this."

The formula economics we are seeing now is dominating public policy and the provision of services in Australia. These policy advisers usually have backgrounds in economics, rather than a range of backgrounds that had previously typified the public service in the western world, and typically were educated in the most elite private schools in Australia. The market decides.

So we've had a shift in emphasis from services to clients and customers to a preoccupation with dividends to share holders. This seems to me to be blatantly obvious, it's not rocket science! If you privatise an electricity company then the prime motivation of that company shifts from quality provision to the clients and the customers wherever they may be to maximise the return to the shareholders to maximise return on capital investment.

This is now part of the educational landscape. In my opinion it is bizarre that we have allowed the 'for profit' sector to take over the services at the times in our life span when we are most vulnerable. So we now have 'for profit' providers wanting to maximise the returns on their capital investment in the birth to 5 sector. In NSW we are witnessing a massive struggle where 'for profit' providers of early childhood education are putting incredible pressure on the state government to change the minimum qualification requirements of the staff and to change the staff student ratio. This is an inevitable consequence when your prime motivation is maximising your returns. Even the most elite private schools in Australia aren't for profit!! As a society we've allowed the early childhood sector to be taken over by people whose aim is making profit. The same thing has happened at the other end of our lifespan. We've placed our minister for aged care services in an extraordinary difficult position (an impossible position). Bronwyn Bishop is trying, by various forms of regulation, to ensure high quality aged care. On the other hand she is pressured by big multinational companies whose aim is to maximise their profits, and to cut their costs as far as they can. So that they are maximising the returns to their shareholders – maximising the return on their capital. That has placed that minister of that portfolio in a virtually impossible position. That says something about us as a society. That we have allowed the points in our lives when we are most vulnerable to be taken over by the 'for profit' sector.

These policies have led to massive withdrawal of services in rural and regional Australia. We can go through the list again, and you know this better than I do, the banks are gone, the post office's gone, the pharmacy's gone, and if there ever was one, the Medicare office has closed. The airlines are a good example of the 'let the market decide' philosophy, it's market forces and it's maximising profits, it's not providing services. So more expensive services to rural and regional Australia are cut. We shouldn't shy away from that. There is nothing to be embarrassed or be ashamed of. The collapse of many regional airlines is symptomatic of letting the market decide. They cut the expensive components and concentrate on the high volume lucrative routes. So where are these cheap airfares that we have all been promised are a result of deregulation of the airline industry, where are the cheap flights – Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne. It's cheaper to go Sydney to Melbourne than it is to go Sydney to Bathurst. The evidence is there if you look at power generation situation in Victoria or New Zealand or California where profit is the important thing rather than provision of services to the customer.

Bob Garrison, from the University of NSW, provides a telling all illustration of how 'neutral' market policy can work against rural interest. In the past Australian airports charged a common landing fee, i.e., $3 a kilo, with competition policy Sydney airport now charges 60c and Rockhampton airport $8 a kilo. Here the old Australian story the tyranny of distance has taken a novel twist. We won't go into petrol prices. I have had long and very sophisticated arguments with the economists at CSU's Western Region Research Institute on petrol prices. But nobody can adequately explain to me why it costs 15c more a litre to get petrol when I'm driving back from Sydney from Mt Victoria to Bathurst or Orange. That's the difference in the price. There's no, to me no logical explanation of that that stands up.

Education provision is now exposed to these market forces. I mean it's no good us beating our breasts, we're a part of it, we have to contend with it, we have to face up to it. We have to keep saying that education, educating children is not the same as producing white goods at Email or producing electricity. You can't just lift out the principles and policies of the other sectors of the economy and say that we should apply them to the education of children. Educating children is different from producing whitegoods at Email.

The highest quality public education is fundamental to our democracy. It's fundamental to our future as a civilised society. Ken Boston, once again in a very well argued piece, in the Sydney Morning Herald when the senate were debating the changes to education funding, said "We are in danger of the public education system simply becoming the safety net" and we can't afford that as a nation. We just can not afford to have a two tier system that divides the country. It's a fundamental base of our democracy to our civilised society.

Chris Sidoti, in his report on education provision in rural and regional Australia, identifies some comments from the UN convention against discrimination in education, to which Australia is a signatory. "An inferior standard of education can amount to unlawful discrimination". As one example in that declaration – are we saying sharp disparities in spending policies that result in different qualities of education for persons residing in different geographical locations and different social groups can constitute discrimination.

If we are going to provide education that aims to give every kid an equal chance and I don't think we should take anything less. It may cost more to provide the kid in Bourke or Willcania the equal chance with a kid in Turramurra or Pymble. That's something that Jonathan Sher, in those earliest OECD releases in the late 70's, hammered. If we are serious about high quality education being the basis of our democracy then it will cost more. It's not just simple arithmetic, you can't just take an amount of money available and divide by the number of kids. That won't work out or ensure equality of outcomes, it won't ensure equality of opportunity for those kids. That is something I think we need to keep at the forefront, it may well cost more to give some kids that equal chance that it does for others. We shouldn't shy away from that. It is not an urban/rural issue, it also would apply in various parts of our huge metropolitan areas.

Inevitably teachers are the key, they're the front line troops. Not only in terms of the curriculum. In an interview earlier I was saying how important teachers are as the service sector is declining in rural and regional Australia. Teachers increasingly provide a community focal point community. The pub's gone or they have to drive a long way to the pub, the banks closed, the post office has closed. Schools are increasingly important community focal points. They are often the only focal point. Hence we are now expecting more and more of the teachers. Teachers are the front line troops, not only in the provision of curriculum, but in the social attitudes that are important to us as a civilised society. We don't have to scratch very far in our culture or society to find sexist, racist and homophobic attitudes that need to be challenged and confronted.

Currently the NSW review of teacher education (conducted by Gregor Ramsey) and the task force working on how it might be implemented are considering a wide range of options. The key feature of that review, one that I think NSW should hold onto, is that we should make teachers and quality teaching a priority. Furthermore our teachers need our support.

I want to turn to Commonwealth Government funding because that is a crucial part of the context that is affecting the provision of education. Max Walsh in an article in the Bulletin the week before last talks about the massive reduction of funding to universities. He puts that against the massive increase of funding to the non-government schools.

> *While Menzies held office for 17 years the key to his survival after 1954 was the existence of the democratic labour party. The longevity of the Menzies government was entirely due to the disciplined delivery of preferences from the DLP to the Liberals. This was an uncomfortable alliance. In those days the Liberal party was widely regarded as being anti-Catholic. However, Menzies established his credentials with the Catholic hierarchy, when he introduced legislation that provided commonwealth funds for building science blocks in private schools. Some of us may remember that. The amount of money involved was piddling. But this Menzies initiative marked an end of an era when both the major parties supported a universal secular education system. This was indeed a brilliant political move by Menzies. That it not only locked up the DLP preferences but it drove a wedge through the Labour party where the State Aid issue was a deeply emotional one. Just how strongly the little acorn has grown is illustrated in this year's budget papers. Where it is revealed that "commonwealth funding to non-government schools will soon over take the funds allocated to higher education". I think that's an amazing turn around.*
>
> *The most significant feature about the rise and rise of federal funding of non-government schools has been that the motivation has not changed since the Menzies day. It has been politically driven. This has been shown once again, by the latest educational 'fixing of the books' that has seen the Howard government significantly increase the funds going to Australia's wealthiest schools. Notice that the additional funding is not justified on the basis that it will actually improve anybody's education. Parents vote the children don't.*
>
> *The fact that Beasley, a former university lecturer, has a concept of a 'knowledge nation' as the centre piece of his campaign might encourage*

> *the view that the commonwealth will actually implement policies concerned with educational as distinct from political outcomes.*

We should insist that our governments allocate funding on the basis of educational needs not on perceived political outcomes. This is a really important point that Max Walsh makes. Max Walsh is in fact a very conservative journalist. This analysis shows just how far the allocation of public funds has switched and demonstrates the gross unfairness of the allocation of education dollars on political rather than educational criteria. The reactions of some of the principals of the elite private schools to the windfalls they will receive under the EBA formula varies. The front page of the Bathurst newspaper headlines "Fee reductions at All Saints" because of this Federal Government funding change. Another said "we're going to cut class sizes by 3". What a difference a windfall like this would make to State and Catholic systemic schools.

Another Principal told me "I'll be able to increase teachers' salaries and employ the best teachers". The point is that the funding is not being made on educational needs it's being made on political grounds.

I want to spend a bit of time on growing teacher shortages. That is another crucial part of the context. You talk to any principal trying to find casual teachers in rural and regional Australia or the western suburbs of Sydney or Melbourne and they will tell you of increasing scarcity. This is usually the first sign that teacher shortages are on the way. We've got evidence here in NSW of shortages in particular secondary areas such as maths, physics, and TAS. Here in Wagga Wagga we have successfully won a DET contract for an Accelerated Teacher Education programme to train TAS teachers. We saw the week before last Glen Innes Catholic High School closing down because they couldn't get any science teachers. This teacher shortage situation is part of what the OECD is calling a meltdown scenario. There is a real concern that as things get tighter there is a potential for collapse. If we look across the western world, the backbone of the major public professions of teaching and nursing have been the baby boomers. They are all moving out; there's a massive exodus. We see New Zealand advertising here in Australia for teachers. Other states advertising for teachers, the US have calculated they are going to need 2.3 million new teachers by 2010. The Faculty of Education at CSU was approached by 5 or 6 recruiting agencies from the UK in the last 12 months. There is a real ground swell and demand for teachers which is very quickly going to far exceed supply.

The OECD – Educational Policy Analysis 2001 says

> *The scenario posits a staffing crisis in a context that differs in at least two important respects from that of the baby boom in the 60's when there was also a staffing crisis. First the quality demands in expectations of students for extended educational careers have moved on substantially in 40 years. Second the attractiveness of school level teaching as a career has declined relative to other occupations that usually enjoy greater rewards. This combination of factors comes together in this scenario in the form of a very serious crisis for schools. We can no longer assume that the problem will always be muddled through.*

This is real food for thought. Is this what we are going to experience in the next 5 to 10 years. We must intervene strongly and produce more science, maths, IT, and TAS teachers now. Regional and remote areas will be the first to be hit. Whether or not it is independent, catholic or state schools the pressures are the same. The ramifications are potentially quite serious.

Just a quick note on university funding. The current average across the 38 Australian universities is that only 44% of our funding comes from the federal government. We are being very rapidly turned into businesses. You will all have read articles in the paper about overseas students being treated differently. This pressure is created when you are pushing for the dollar all the time. We are fast losing the community of scholars' notion upon which universities are founded. We must be careful that universities don't simply become job factories. That students are not choosing subjects for the sake of broadening their education but are doing things because it will help them get a job. Many subjects are gradually being squeezed out of the university curriculum. I feel that is a real shame.

I don't want to finish on a note of gloom so I want to get back from where I started. The real plus, what this organisation celebrates, is the creativity of provision of education in rural Australia. I think we have been extraordinarily inventive in maintaining the curriculum diversity. We must continue. We have to hold the line. The telematics project in NSW that uses technology to provide a range of curriculum options, that would not be possible otherwise, is another example of the success of creating provision in rural Australia. The partnership that Charles Sturt University has with the NSW Department of Education and Training in the delivery of HSC online is highly successful in providing support and resources to students studying for their HSC, whether they are based in Turramurra or Bourke. The young man playing for us at the dinner last night is part of the Kooringal High School Blues Band. This band provides an amazing opportunity for those kids. It all happens after school and reflects the impressive dedication of the teachers concerned - one a music teacher the other a maths teacher. This dedication, that you find in the schools in our communities should be celebrated and acknowledged and applauded.

I'll just finish with one comment about our kids in rural and regional Australia. The most important thing we can do as educators is to get them leaving school feeling good about themselves. We must do our best to make sure the experiences that our children have at school are positive and productive. Whether it be the blues band or the rock eisteddfod or the vocational education programs or the level 3 English or Maths. We must make sure there's something in there for all kids, because in the end kids leaving feeling good about themselves or as psychologists would say having a positive self-concept is the basis of a continuing successful rural and regional Australia.

Aliens in the classroom?

Faith Trent
(Flinders University)

Abstract

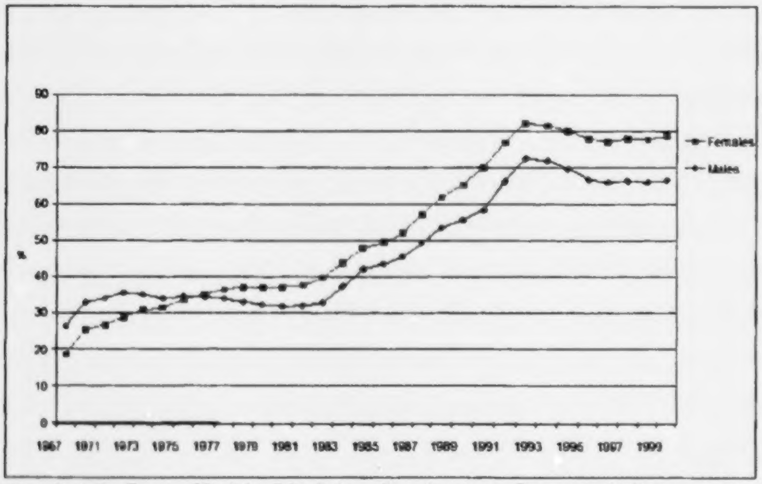
Evidence from a recent research project looking at Adolescent Males' Perceptions of Schooling, Retention and Achievement indicates that there is quite radical rethinking required in terms of schooling meeting the needs of adolescent males. In a sense, the difference between school culture and the wider Australian culture, new learning styles, access to information and the impact of ICT, and student lifestyles all have contributed to there being 'Aliens in the Classroom.'

Learning to live and work with these students means that we need to examine what good teaching is for them, as well as for ourselves, whether our educational structures assist or block achievement of their goals and how we respond so that their level of resistance and despair is reduced.

This presentation takes the view that we need to stop 'fixing up the boys', labelling them as failures and setting our goals for them, and instead look at how the behaviour of schools and the messages they impart enhance or restrict student success.

The education of boys is big news, or perhaps it is the resulting outcomes of the educative process which make us uncomfortable as a society. This is evidenced by the number of press clippings which talk about what is happening to boys in schools. Even the Prime Minister has entered the fray by stating on 15th June that "Australia needed to focus on the educational needs of boys to tackle their widespread disenchantment with school." (Melbourne Age, p. A4)

The Prime Minister is not known for the many statements he makes about education. So why this one? Perhaps the statistical representation, as well as the screaming headlines have attracted his attention. In its submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on the Education of Boys, the Department of Education ,Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, 2000, p. 18) produced some revealing statistics.



Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, various years; Commonwealth Department of Education; Department of Employment, Education and Training (1991) Retention and Participation in Australian Schools, 1967 to 1990, AGPS, Canberra.

Figure 1: Apparent retention rates from the commencement of secondary schooling to Year 12 (%) 1967-1999

These data indicate that retention rates at school peaked in 1992, that the retention rate for girls in Australia has been higher than for boys since 1977 and that the gap between retention rates is growing. Early suggestions that it was those in the low socio-economic group who were leaving and taking up non-professional jobs predominated what discussion there was, followed by a realisation that these jobs were vanishing (although not as fast as some would suppose). However, post 1992, it was impossible to maintain this fiction as more and more boys across the socio-economic spectrum did not complete year 12. Somewhat cynically, I would suggest that when the children of the powerbrokers began to walk away from education, there was deemed to be a 'crisis'.

There are obviously still differences in the numbers of students who choose to leave school early in high and low socio-economic areas and in State and private schools, but the phenomenon exists across all groups in all locations. It is clear, however, that as the DETYA statistics show, there is a higher rate of non-completion in rural areas than in urban. This too is not a new development but understanding its impact is important. The following tables show the extent of the difference.

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Table 1: Year 12 completions by urban, rural and remote location and gender 1984-1998

	Urban			Rural			Remote			Total		
Year	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1984	43	49	46	32	43	38	27	40	33	N/A	N/A	N/A
1985	45	51	47	35	46	40	31	40	36	41	49	45
1987	53	62	58	46	60	53	38	50	44	50	61	56
1988	56	66	61	50	64	57	41	55	48	53	65	59
1989	56	67	62	51	66	58	451	53	47	54	66	60
1990	57	68	63	52	68	60	41	54	47	55	68	61
1991	66	77	71	61	76	68	50	64	57	63	75	69
1992	65	74	70	61	74	67	52	65	58	64	74	69
1993	66	76	71	60	74	67	54	64	58	64	75	69
1994	66	76	71	57	71	64	51	65	58	63	74	68
1995	64	75	69	54	70	62	46	59	52	61	73	67
1996	62	72	67	55	72	63	46	65	55	59	71	65
1997r	61	71	66	54	70	62	43	62	51	58	71	64
1998	62	73	67	55	71	63	48	61	54	60	72	66

Notes: (R)=revised

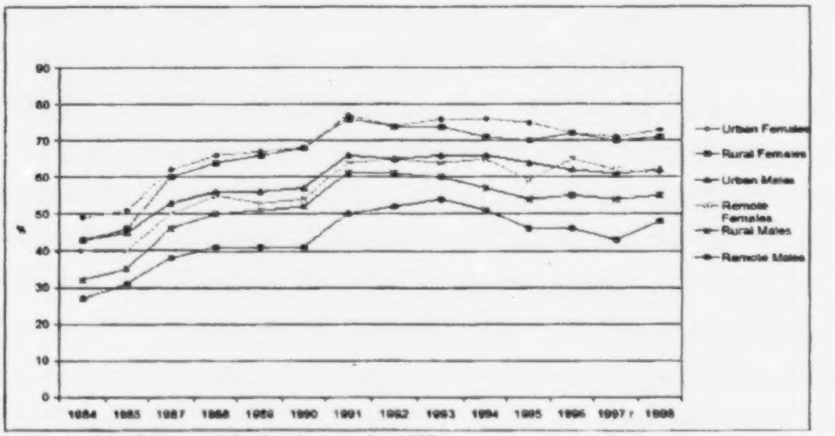
(a) These figures are estimates only. They express the number of Year 12 completions (Year 12 certificates issued by state and education authorities) as a proportion of the estimated population that could attend Year 12 in that calendar year.

(b) Definitions of urban, rural and remote in this table are based on Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification (1995) developed by the DPIE. Urban includes Darwin, Townsville/Thuringowa and Queanbeyan.

(c) Remote comprised approximately three per cent of the 15-19 year old population in 1998 and, as a result, relatively small changes in the estimated resident population or in the number of completions annually can lead to apparently substantial changes

Source: As in Statistical Annex (National Schooling Report), 1991 – revised figures from earlier reports and the ABS

The data can be more clearly represented as in the following graph, which illustrates that two factors, gender and location, appear to influence decisions made about schooling by students in general and boys in particular. (DETYA, 2000, p. 48)



Source: National Report on Schooling in Australia, 1997

(DETYA:2000, p. 49)

Figure 2: Year 12 completion rates by locality and gender, 1984 to 1998 (%)

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The differences are quite startling- in 1998, over 70% of rural girls completed year 12, as compared with 55% of rural boys and fewer than 50% of remote boys. There are obviously a multiplicity of reasons for this, and for those of you who are involved in rural settings, you can provide better explanations than me. However, we were struck in our work with how the boys in country towns being fewer in numbers in later years, can make comparisons about life choices and how the pressures on boys who remain at school in rural areas may be more severe than for their urban counterparts.

Finally, in the same submission, DETYA goes on to state that

> *Leaving school before completing year 12 is of concern because of the high correlation between completing high school and achieving successful labour market outcomes.* (DETYA, 2000, 11)

In the current environment it is not surprising, perhaps, that jobs and labour markets are the focus of the rhetoric but for me there are a number of accompanying issues which are equally worthy of attention. These centre on what is happening to the boys themselves, how they feel about education and how valued they feel. Currently, Australia has the highest rate of young male suicide per capita in the world and there is a level of disillusionment and despair which must be of concern. Given the proportion of time students spend in school, we need to ensure that it plays a positive role in their lives and not a negative one. Issues of school retention and achievement for boys, as well as girls, and the reasons for the choices they make therefore are critically important.

We at Flinders University were funded by DETYA to talk to young males between the ages of 16-18 about schooling, retention and achievement. In the end we spoke to 1 800 year 9,11 and 12 students in urban and rural settings and in State, Catholic and Independent schools in South Australia. We also spoke to representatives of 60 schools who came to a number of workshops to say what they were doing and to hear about our results. We used a methodology which employed focus groups of 10 students, including students educationally at risk and those who spanned the achievement range, including high achievers. At a later stage we designed a questionnaire based on the responses of the boys and used this with 200 other girls and boys. The questionnaire is found in Appendix 1.

From the information gained from the workshops undertaken with teachers and principals, there is no doubt that a number of strategies are being employed in schools. Varieties of programs have been suggested and implemented which deal with masculinity, comparisons of the retention rates , achievement or non-achievement of boys with girls, the lack of male teachers in classrooms and the apparent need for appropriate role models. To date there is little evidence of the level of success of these programs. They generally reflect the fact that the voices of academics, of teachers and principals, of the media and of parents have been heard but until relatively recently there had been no voices of the boys. This is changing with studies reported by Yates (1998), SSABSA (1999), Rowe (2000) and Kenway (2000) among others. We found that many of the programs had been designed without consultation with the boys and with a view to 'fixing the boys up' by giving them what it was felt they needed. When the boys were interviewed it became clear that in the majority of cases, the programs either had little impact or were resented by them. It would seem sensible then to listen to what they had to say and then jointly to decide what is the best way forward. This does not imply that there will not be differences of opinion or perspective, but the boys, as we all do, will act on their own perceptions, particularly if we are not prepared to listen and value their opinions. So what were their opinions?

Our research revealed a broad range of interconnected factors that adolescent males believe make schooling a process they don't like, don't value and that they cannot change *"because nobody's listening"*. It has been evident from the outset that most boys are clear and uniform in their perspective of the issues and problems in years 9-12 and in their general view declining rates of achievement and retention are inevitable because the adult world is *"not listening"* and *"not genuinely interested"* in their views, their well-being and, for many, their educational needs and outcomes. As they told us:

> *They don't want to listen. They make the rules. There is always an excuse.*
> (Year 9-11)

> *They always make things sound the way they want ... what they want sound best. Ya don't stand a chance.* (Year 11)

Furthermore, the boys have obviously thought about their educational experience often and at length, and have well-formed views about a range of factors that continue to shape and direct their achievement and their ability or preparedness to remain at school.

Although the boys are not familiar with the literature, most of them have seen or heard achievement and retention issues discussed in the media. From what they have said, it is clear that they regard the views of the adult world, on these matters, to simplify matters to the point of being wrong. They believe that adults don't ask young people what they think and that they certainly don't ask in a way that establishes trust and mutual respect; they don't listen, and they don't really want to know, particularly if it requires or necessitates substantial changes on their part.

Even though a good deal of what the boys have said differs from the views expressed in much of the literature, the media, and what passes as 'common sense', these differences will not be critically examined at length in this paper In no sense are the responses 'right' or 'wrong' but they do represent their reality which informs the decisions about achievement and retention the boys make.

The boys identified a range of interconnected factors which influence their decision making and perceptions about schooling and their place in it, emphasising the following:

- the adult world is not listening, or not genuinely listening; and
- school expects adult behaviour but doesn't deliver an adult environment.

These themes recurred throughout the interviews, and were strongly held. Given that 80% of the boys are working up to 20 hours per week in what is considered by society to be an adult environment, they have a mechanism for comparison.

The views they expressed to us are reinforced by a study undertaken by the SSABSA in 1999, whose results show two important things: the differences between the perception of staff and students; and the almost complete lack of self analysis undertaken by the staff, with a view of the boys' being responsible for their dilemma.

The responses of students and staff in the SSABSA study are graphed below. The lack of correlation between the ascribed reasons for students in senior secondary schools failing to complete year 12, shows a very different world view. At a time where, as part of the Knowledge Nation statement, Kym Beasley has pledged to have year 12 completions at 90%, it would seem important to understand why students are leaving school, from their point of view as well as from the official point of view.

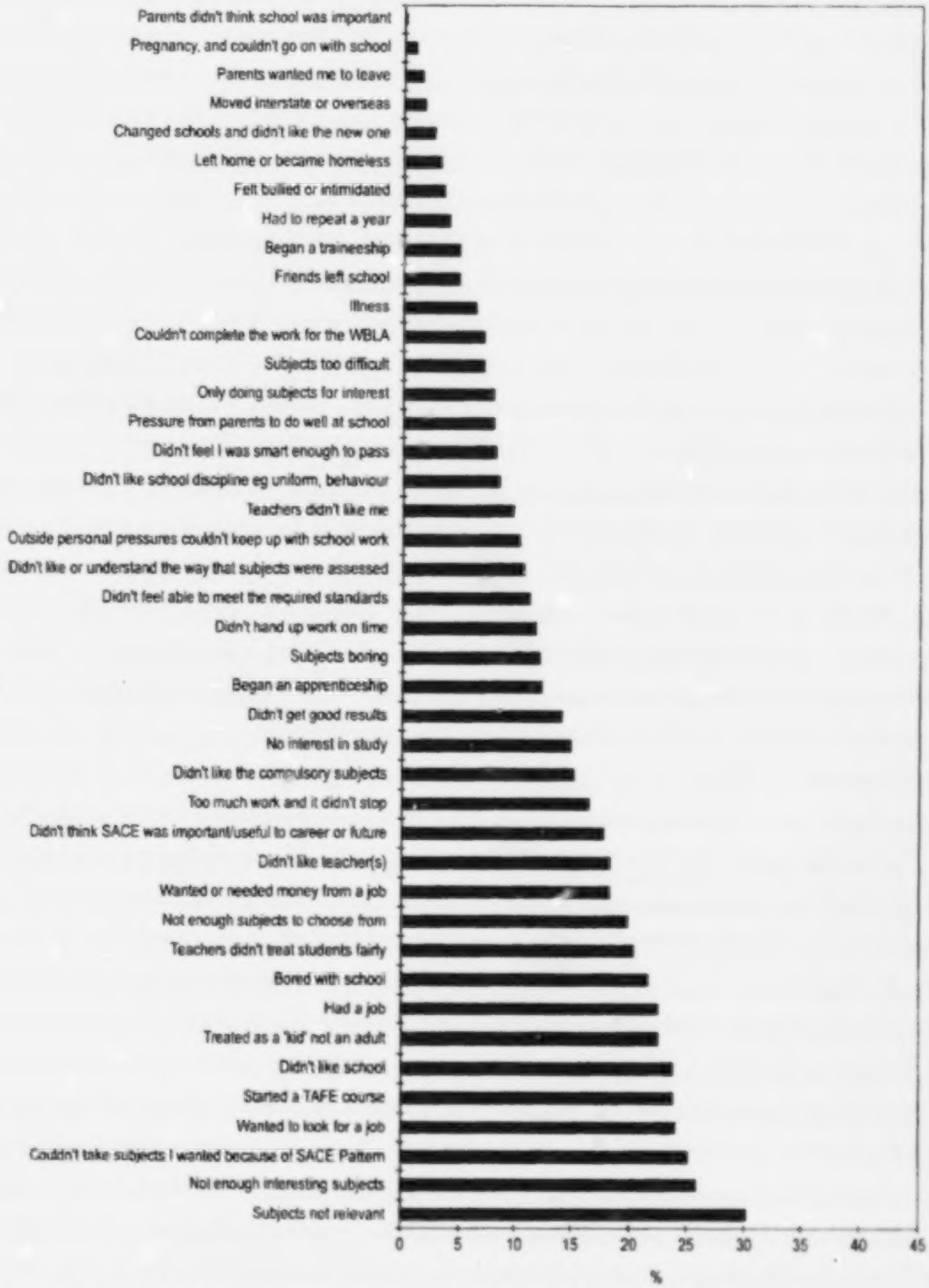

Figure 3: Students' reasons for leaving school (SSSABSA July 1997, p. 95)

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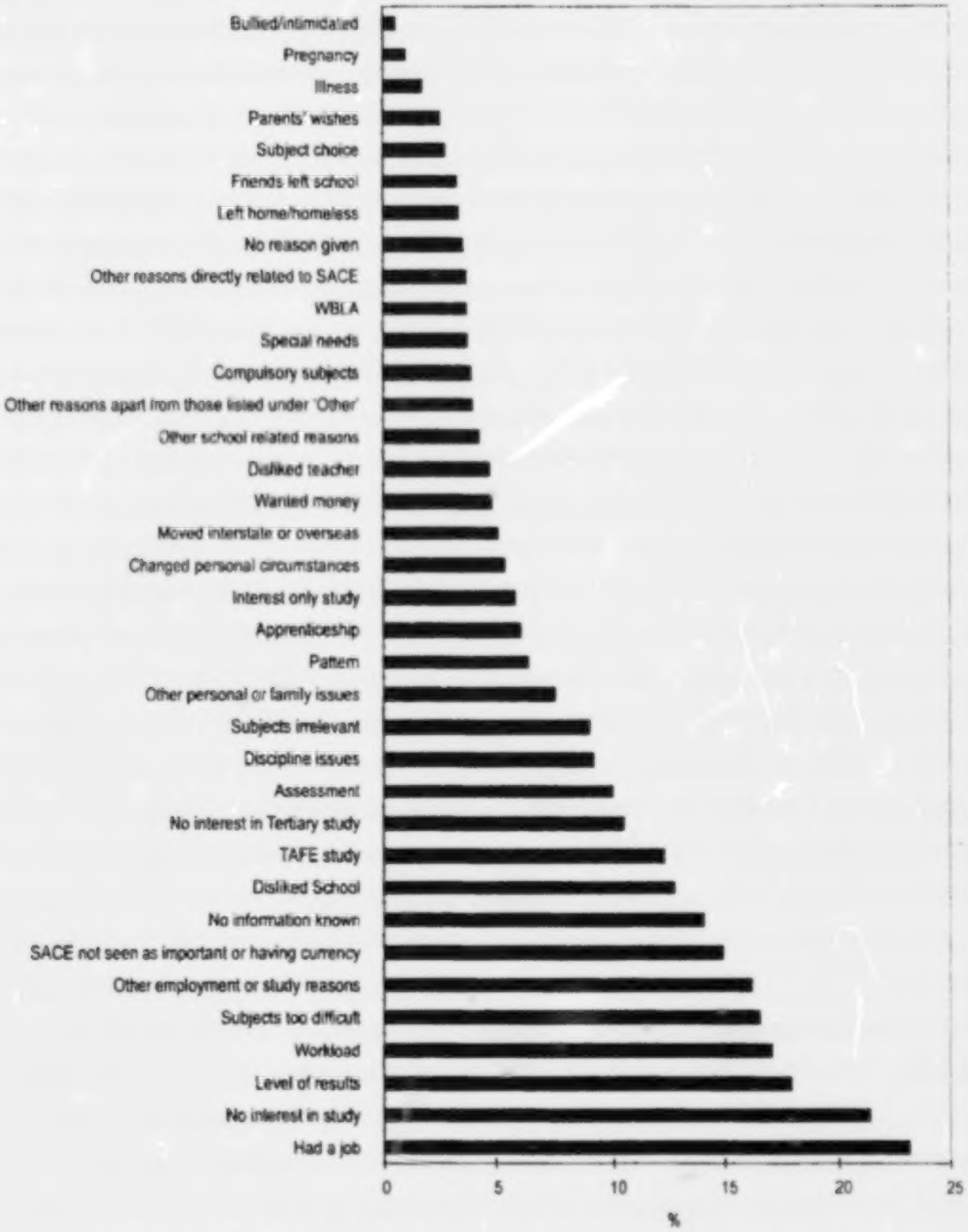

Figure 4: Response of school staff outlining students' reasons for leaving early (SSABSA July 1997, p. 89)

The authors of the SSABSA study comment:

One of the strongest messages was that students in senior schools should be treated with respect and as adults and people, not as children; their opinions should be valued; they should be given more freedom, they are not small children straight from kindy! As one student remarked, Just teachers need to change. They act as if they have so much authority. Teachers should know how to relate to students in our age group. Some teachers make you feel like dirt. (SSABSA:1999, p. 108)

Our study produced the same responses.

- Most boys don't value school; it's more about getting credentials than learning, and these don't operate usefully as short term motives. Apart from the social life, school for most boys is considered to be an unwanted means to an end that starts out being too distant and becomes increasingly unachievable.
- School work is boring, repetitive and irrelevant.

This was a repeated lament.

> *You don't really learn that well if you can't concentrate because you're bored.* (Year 9)
>
> *Teachers should do more things to make it interesting. They could do creative things instead of just sitting down filling in things on a work sheet kind of stuff.* (Year 9)
>
> *It's the same for all lessons pretty much.* (Year 9)
>
> *We do real easy stuff ... we've done it all before ... it's heaps boring; it's all theory ... stuff you can't use.* (Year 9)
>
> *I think school is too repetitive. Like in English you do the same things over and over again. We watch a movie and then go and do a review about it, then we read a book and do a review about it. That's what I get sick of doing ...* (Year 9)
>
> *We've been doing that since Year 8 and 9 and 10 ...* (Year 11)
>
> *I find that Year 11, (and 12 I've been told) ... that it's pointless, because you don't learn anything. They just get you to do assignments. You don't learn anything at all ... When you do assignments, you don't really care what you do, you just write it down so you can finish it ...* (Year 9-11)
>
> *You only copy out of books or from other people, so you're not learning anything ..* (Year 9-11)
>
> *And in maths it's just sheets* [work sheets] ... (Year 9)

- School doesn't offer the courses that most boys want to do; largely courses and coursework that *'get you ready for a job'*.

This further compounds the paradoxical dilemma of education for boys, namely, that they have to stay in a place that they believe they can't stay in, doing work that they believe is of no value, in order to get qualifications that they believe do not accurately measure their ability, but which they will need if they are to get the chance to demonstrate their real ability to learn 'on the job'.

There is a real issue about education and credentialism which needs disentangling here. The dominant rhetoric in the outside world is about credentials and jobs, in schools it is about education and learning. Not surprisingly many students take an instrumentalist view of their time in schools, focussing on credentials rather than being involved in learning. This presents a dilemma for many teachers - it is not insoluble but it is frequently seen to be a student problem, rather than an opportunity to engage in an understanding of different points of view.

- School pushes boys into a downward spiral of disaffection, resistance, resentment, anger and retaliation that, for many, is just too hard to stop.

The response from the boys to each of these is similar, namely disaffection, making resistance seem necessary, which compounds the problem, leading to resentment, anger and retaliation. The display of their response seems to be all that differs from boy to boy. For a few it is a minor irritation that is easily dealt with through compliance, but for many, the compulsion to respond, directly or indirectly, becomes an obstacle to achievement:

> *We get them back and muck up with teachers that don't respect us.* (Year 9)

Objective despair logically follows from the boys' experience in education and they show very little interest in denying the logic that makes it necessary. Indeed, they seem to be determined to follow this logic at any cost. Hence, too often the spiral of disaffection is a process that they consider necessary:

> *You can't just sit there. You got to fight back, muck up, or somethin'. What else can you do?* (Year 9)

Despite the immediate satisfaction of being heard by way of causing disruption, the spiral of disaffection, resentment and anger is not considered by the boys to be a response that is likely to achieve a great deal. It appears to be a last resort, and perhaps a cry for help or a response driven by despair; not only the more familiar subjective 'feelings' of despair, but a rational, objective despair.

- **School presents too many contradictions and too many debilitating paradoxes,**

> *like, one of my mates had, like, a beard, and he's been told off by the teacher, and it's an expectation of the school to shave it off ... It was a clean shaved beard ... It didn't have this morning's corn flakes in it or anything ... It looked good and they told him to go away. (Year 11)*
>
> *We get caned [not physically] for having facial hair at school, these days.*
>
> *Teachers are allowed to have facial hair. But the thing is the feeling there ...Teachers should have to live by the same expectations as us.*

School pushes the rhetoric of education (e.g., fairness, justice, respect, flexibility, the celebration of difference, etc.) but produces the opposite in practice.

Much attention is currently being paid to bullying and rightly so, but before we are horrified by bullying between students, we need to ensure that we are not supporting institutional bullying. While in schools, I have heard staff tell kids they are stupid, jocularly put them down, shout at them and use authority as a weapon. If students respond in a similar fashion, they are rude and are generally 'disciplined'. Even the use of the word often reflects assumptions about the nature of interactions in schools. I have some doubts about the system of prefects and what it implies, but schools must of course organise themselves as they see in their best interests and to be sensitive to community requirements. Research shows that school bullying is much less likely to take place in schools where the internal culture does not portray or reflect a hierarchical, bullying structure and where all students are respected and not belittled.

Significantly, stereotypes, false dichotomies and similar culturally archival concepts, are at their most destructive in information technology, where most traditional distinctions become fuzzy. The boys, for example, fail to understand why computer games and the use of email are excluded from their academic program, why teachers spend so much time *"trying to block internet sites"* that are easily accessed from home, why teachers don't understand computers much, why they "*force students to learn what they already know*, and why teachers and librarians stand guard over computers that have already passed their use by date.

Boys who talked about their ability to "*build computers*" and who have been "*programming for five years*", or who have found ways of "*getting into blocked sites*" and so on, also talked about their frustration at being forced to do boring, menial tasks in the classroom like "*opening and closing files*" and how their resistance had led to 'withdrawal' from computing classes and, in one case, a three day suspension. They also talked of being excluded from computing facilities because they refused to take their hats off, or because they 'used' email or loaded 'games' onto school computers. In the Survey of Student Views, 76 per cent of boys agreed with the statement that 'Teachers don't know much about computers and they won't let you tell them.'

School is about preparing you for adult life, but adult life gets in the way of school; culturally celebrated achievements and rites of passage into adult life (e.g. participation in competitive sport, getting a driver's license, owning a car, getting part time work, providing for their own needs, helping to run a household, as well as establishing an adult identity, social life and sexual relationships) are negative influences on school achievement and on the preparedness of boys to stay at school.

For most boys, school is focused on preserving the status-quo, which makes it culturally out of date and paradigmatically inflexible. It remains detached from the real world, distant from the rest of their lives, and neither convincingly forward looking, nor plausibly concerned with the need to prepare students for a place within the emerging society.

From what the boys are saying, they would regard the apparent lack of confidence on the part of teachers more as a lack of interest. They believe that many initiatives fail because there are *"too many bad teachers"*, who *"don't ask"*, *"don't listen"*, *"don't care"* and who are not culturally 'up to date'. They also believe that there are too many *"old"* teachers. Although old teachers are not necessarily bad teachers because they are old, there is a strong view that the prevalence of older teachers accounts for the lack of interest in new ideas and their cynicism about the value of established ideas and strategies. (Trent & Slade, 2001)

The boys are however quite clear about what constitutes good teaching, how important it is and that they can recognise it. They find it hard to understand why if some teachers can do it, others can't.

The participants in this study have been clear, constructive and detailed in defining the constituting features of good teaching from their perspective; providing more than 60 defining features of a 'good teacher'. Interestingly, their emphasis is always placed on the skills of teachers; their ability and willingness to establish relationships of mutual respect and friendship with their students.

A good teacher is one who:

- listens to what you have to say;
- respects you as a person; treats you like a friend; treats you as an adult;
- is relaxed, enjoys their day, and is able to laugh, especially at mistakes;
- is flexible, adjusting rules and expectations to meet the needs of individuals and particular circumstances;
- explains the work; makes the work interesting; finds interesting things to do;
- doesn't humiliate you in front of the class; doesn't try to destroy you so that you'll leave school, or tell you you're no good and that you should leave school;
- doesn't write slabs of work on the board to be copied;
- lets you talk and move about in the classroom;
- doesn't favour girls, or the boys who do what they're told;
- doesn't keep picking on people who have a reputation, pushing them to retaliate;
- doesn't mark you down because of your behaviour; and
- gives you a chance to muck up and learn from it.

From their remarks about good teachers, the boys are identifying teachers who go beyond the 'policies and aims' of education and its contemporary rhetoric about thinking in terms of interdependence and relativity. Essentially, they are describing teachers who, professionally and personally, are taking risks by listening, responding, respecting, trusting and valuing their students more than the rules, the policies, the legal precedents, their training, careers, the reputation of the school, and in some cases, small but vocal groups of parents:

> *Good teachers are flexible with your behaviour. You can joke in class. We drop a couple of words ... we shouldn't, but he doesn't give detentions. He breaks the rules of the school but he doesn't break his own. He's nice to you so you abide by him, we've got respect for him.* (Year 11)

Ironically, the kind of non-compliance that characterises these teachers seems to make them more successful at teaching and more valued as positive role models and often mentors:

> *Whatever they do, is what we do. If they're a good teacher and they do better stuff, we do better stuff. If they are a crappy teacher, we do bad stuff.* (Year 9)
>
> *They be good to you, you be good to them ... that's it.* (Year 9-11)
>
> *... they are not completely strict ... no one really talks a lot and there is not a lot of telling off in the class ... Everybody seems to have respect for everyone else and there is not a lot of mucking around.* (Year 11)
>
> *We'll get further with teachers like that ... we're motivated to work if the teacher's relaxed. It makes it fun. We want to work.* (Year 9)
>
> *If the teacher's relaxed we're going to achieve more because we want to achieve more.* (Year 9)

Despite the broad and complex association of factors, the boys consistently and emphatically see their retention and achievement problems primarily in terms of their relationship with teachers and what they see to be a proliferation of 'bad' teachers who are given too much power. A uniformly repeated view is that a 'good' teacher changes everything. One good teacher, alone, is enough to make a bad lot tolerable and achievement, in an otherwise repressive, oppressive environment, seem possible.

However, it is clear in the boys' responses that 'the teacher' symbolises the system and the culture of the school.

It is therefore an important consideration, whether the culture of the school relates to the culture of the rest of their lives. I would submit that currently the culture of the school is further removed from the culture of the wider Australian society than it has ever been in our history.

Culture of school and the wider world

The traditional debates about schooling have been between the positions of schooling as a transmitter of culture and a leader of new ideas. I would submit that for many of the boys the school transmits a culture which has little changed in 40 years, in classrooms which apart from the new carpet and some computers look as they did in the 1950s, with learning being conducted as their parents might have found it. Education of the 70s and 80s did work for many of us as our influence in the current society attests.

We are a better educated nation than we have ever been before - the majority of illiteracy which is used as a figure in the papers or by the current Federal Minister to make us feel guilty occurs in those above 55. This is true for all groups in Australia, including Indigenous Australians. The ACER data show that Australian 14 year olds are achieving well above the international average in mathematics and science, with 19% of Australian students being in the top 10% in the world. More of us complete tertiary education than ever before and our young are far more globally and politically aware than we were at their age. They may, of course, choose both to reject using that knowledge and to resent its intrusion into their lives, but nonetheless they are playing out their lives in a world far different from the one in which most of us in this room grew up. They are the 'Aliens in the Classroom' but not cultural aliens in the wider world.

Let me illustrate by quoting from a handout at Macquarie University about their first year students. Students in schools of course are even more separated from some of the things we take for granted.

"The people who are in year 12 in 2001 were born in 1983. For them, there has been only one Pope. They were 11 when the Soviet Union broke apart and do not remember the Cold War. They have never feared a nuclear war. They are too young to remember the space shuttle blowing up.

Tianamen Square means nothing to them.

Bottle caps have always been screw off and plastic. Atari predates them, as do vinyl albums. The expression "you sound like a broken record "means nothing to them. They have never owned a record player. They have likely never played Pac Man. They may have never heard of an 8 track. The Compact Disc was introduced when they were 1 year old. As far as they know, stamps have always cost about 45 cents.

They have always had an answering machine. Most have never seen a TV set with only 4 channels, nor have they seen a black-and-white TV. They have always had cable. There have always been VCRs, but they have no idea what BETA is.

They cannot fathom not having a remote control. They were born the year that Walkmans were introduced by Sony.

Roller-skating has always meant inline for them. Brian Henderson has always read the Channel Nine news. They have no idea when or why flares were cool. Popcorn has always been cooked in the microwave. They never took a swim and thought about Jaws. The Vietnam War is as ancient history to them as WWI, WWII and the Boer War. They have no idea that Americans were ever held hostage in Iran.

They can't imagine what hard contact lenses are. They do not care who shot J. R. and have no idea who J. R. is. The Titanic was found? They thought we always knew where it was. Michael Jackson has always been

> *white. McDonalds never came in styrofoam containers. They don't have a clue how to use a typewriter."* (Macquarie University, 2000)

But that is only one part of it all. Probably more importantly, they are faced with more choices earlier and earlier in their lives. It seems from some recent research that they learn differently, are far more visual, learn chaotically rather than linearly, live better with dichotomies, and they certainly have access to information and opinion in ways which are beyond most of our ability to imagine. We talk of the impact of information technology on our and their lives, but outside of school they live it. The nature of communication, of work patterns, of conceptions of time and space, of friendships and interactions are all quite different from how we organise and structure learning and interaction in schools.

At schools where the Information Technology teachers are regarded as 'good teachers' the state of the facilities, the speed of the modem, and so on, are not the major issue. In one school, the boys described the 'Info Tech' teacher as *"a legend"* largely because *"he listens", "he treats you like a friend", "he takes you seriously"*, and he *"lets you do stuff"* . From much of what was said, it is evident that this particular teacher has understood that computing is not just a new technology, it is also a new way of life, involving new dimensions of space and time, new expectations and a virtual world in which distinctions between reality and fantasy collapse, and notions like 'distance', 'tomorrow', 'limits', 'restrictions, 'blocked sites' and even 'copyright' make very little sense.

We need to recognise that these 'aliens in the classroom' are growing up in a different and technological world. Instead of trying to confine or manage that world, it is imperative in my view that schools focus on helping them to choose wisely, to understand consequences by reasoning them through, to differentiate between the wealth of inputs. This means that the roles of schools and teachers are not those of knowledge givers, in the main, or of knowledge organisers as they have been in the past but they must be guiders, mentors, and problem solvers.

It is not a sensible use of our time to try to confine the Net or to say technology can only be used in this or that way, for this or that purpose because its very existence and design is based on chaos and uncontrollability. We have a unique opportunity to shape how they use what they glean, by accepting the nature of the technology and learning about its use from them in exchange for their learning about how to make judgments about its worth, and how to resolve the dichotomies it presents.

The separation of schooling from the rest of life is, for me, one of the big issues facing us. I do not think that ever before have we had such a gap between the life of students inside and outside school. We exhort older students to behave 'like adults'- a somewhat ill-defined concept and we treat them like children. From year 10 on, up to 80% of them are working up to 20 hours a week and we do not accept or value that. In the meantime, we talk of getting them work ready. We talk of teaching them to make decisions but we do not allow them to do so, unless they are the decisions we wish them to make. They live in a world where from an early age everyone is on first name terms – the terms Aunt and Uncle are fast disappearing - and we impose a formality that exists nowhere else except perhaps in the army.

Given the current push to change the culture of the army, perhaps it is not the best model to follow.

> *The people who've got control are the one's who have to change; have to give up being control freaks, seein' everythin' the way they want to ... Anyway, the ones who do well at school are the ones who are like the teachers. In twenty years they'll be running the schools and nothin' will have changed - except most of 'em'll be women. But that's no big difference. A control freak's a control freak. Men or women, doesn't matter.*

In my view, there are some areas in which schools should oppose rather than transmit some aspects of the culture. One of these is in the area of bullying - because there is bullying in the wider world - workplace bullying, bullying in the armed services, bullying among some in the churches, bullying in the name of discipline does not mean that the culture of the school should reflect or endorse it. There are other examples which I am sure you can identify.

So what does this mean for teacher education?

I consider that there are huge challenges for teacher education, at both pre- and post-service level. Teacher educators need to understand the larger cultural issues and the nature of the learning which is occurring, particularly when it is part of the 'hidden curriculum'. There is a need for universities, as part of teacher education programs, to ensure that graduates have strategies to avoid the abuse of power, that professional development focuses on how to recognise and deal with bullying, violence and despair among students.

We need to marry a focus on discipline and curriculum studies with a genuine ability to be non-judgmental, to listen and to teach our students not only to listen but to hear and to give them strategies to understand and shape the cultures of the schools. It is important that students are literate but literacy goes far beyond that in the world of Dr Kemp. Our teacher education students and teachers in the system need the skills to work in critical literacy in all communication modes - we do not need better and better acknowledged, footnoted and non-plagiarised 'crap'.

Most importantly, as educators we need to respect the young. We need to listen to them because if we don't they will not listen to us. We need to reflect on how we structure our world and what messages we send as institutions and as individuals. We need to acknowledge their areas of expertise and expect them to acknowledge ours. We need to ensure that we understand how they measure success, as well as explaining to them what we mean by it. We need to help them to feel proud of who they are, so we can feel proud of who we are and the role we have played in their lives. As they say, a good teacher makes all things tolerable and possible.

We in higher education need to radically rethink much of what we do in the education, not training, of teachers. We need, with the profession, to move together to ensure that politicians and the media recognise the essential role that educators perform and what it would look like if we didn't exist or were not as good at what we do as we are. We need to make the politicians and the media recognise how little we spend on our greatest cultural capital, in comparison with almost every other Western world country and many Asian nations.

We in teacher education need to practise what we preach. We talk of reflective practice but we often do not reflect on the nature of what we are transmitting but spend lots of time on what we are transmitting. We need to be sure we are not exacerbating the 'alienness' by passing on a culture which exists in our heads rather than in their and their students' reality. That means learning to critically evaluate our own performances, knowing that we are not perfect, nor do we have all the answers It is only then that we can pass on to our students the skills to do the same so that they can change the culture of the schools, to the benefit of both the girls and the boys.

Finally, as teacher educators and teachers, there is a great need to take risks, to involve everyone from a very early age in the decisions about their own education. We need to be able to embrace change, rather than resist it as the waves of cultural change of each generation impact on us. Then perhaps the classrooms or cyberspaces of 2010 will cease to be the classroom of the nineteenth century and education will be a leader in society not a separate part or a follower. Classrooms might even no longer be alien landscapes and all of us might see ourselves as learners.

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Adolescent Student Questionnaire **DRAFT**

Katherine L Dix 20, September 2000

Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐ **Age:** ☐ **Year Level:** ☐

This is a chance to say what you think and how you feel about your educational experiences by responding to a series of statements. The statements have been collected from group discussions with other students of your age. They identify some of the issues and problems faced by these students. We would like to know if your views are different or the same.

It is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. It is important that your answers accurately show how you feel. Your responses are private and will not be shown to your teachers or anyone else.

When you are ready to begin, please read each statement and choose the answer that best describes what you think or feel. Indicate your response by **circling one** of four possible answers:

SD if you **strongly disagree** with the statement
D if you **disagree** with the statement
A if you **agree** with the statement
SA if you **strongly agree** with the statement

If you want to change a response you have circled you should cross out the old answer and circle a new answer on the same line. You should have only one answer for each sentence. Do not leave out or miss any of the sentences. **PLEASE DO NOT TALK** once you have started.

Fairness

1. The student is always wrong, it's never the teacher
2. Teachers won't admit to their own mistakes
3. What teachers want is always right and what the student wants is always wrong
4. If you get into trouble, you never get to say your side of the story
5. Teachers make the rules to suit themselves
6. Girls can cope with the work load because the teachers help them a lot more
7. In sport the boys are expected to do their best, but the girls can muck around
8. The way teachers treat boys and girls differently is a big problem
9. Girls get a better deal at school
10. Girls can get away with more, like changing the colour of their hair. Boys can't.
11. If a girl talks in class nothing happens, but if a boy talks he gets sent out
12. If a boy hasn't finished an assignment he gets a zero, but a girl would get an extension
13. Teachers give more help to the smart students
14. Teachers hold grudges
15. I get a good feeling from making the teacher really pissed off, cause they're doing the same to me
16. A student getting high grades is more likely to get away with stuff
17. Presentation shouldn't be important
18. If something goes wrong boys always get blamed for it
19. If you're not the best they don't care about you

20. Even when I do my work and try my hardest I still don't get the marks I deserve
21. Teachers don't really take time to find out how long it took to do the work and how much effort you put into it
22. Teachers don't even read the essay, they just read the name at the top and give a mark
23. If teachers don't like you, you get a lower mark
24. At school you get punished for stupid things
25. Librarians make their own rules
26. Teachers should look for ways to solve the problems, rather than just punishing kids
27. School should get rid of the kids that just muck around and let the kids that want to be there get where they want to go
28. If you miss some work you should be able to just catch up in your own time, not get told off

Respect for teachers

29. I would have more respect for teachers if I was on a first name basis with them
30. If you don't like the teacher you'll avoid the homework
31. Even though you may not like a subject you still get the work done if the teacher is good
32. I tend to muck around more in class if the teacher is crap
33. If the teacher is good then I usually try harder
34. There are too many bad teachers
35. Teachers swap gossip about kids they don't like
36. Teachers never look at what they're doing to see if they could do it better
37. I don't like teachers so I don't ask questions
38. Teachers that just teach out of the text book don't know the work
39. Younger teachers are usually better cause they are not that different from us
40. The age of a teacher doesn't matter, it's more the sort of person they are and if they can take on new things
41. I hate teachers who hate kids
42. You can't learn to be a good teacher, you need to have the right personality
43. I find it hard to like most adults

Respect from others

44. Teachers make you feel like you're dumb
45. Teachers deliberately humiliate you
46. Teachers think they're better than you
47. There is no point talking to teachers cause they just say you're wrong
48. Teachers tell us to act like adults but they treat us like kids
49. It's harder when you're talking face to face with a teacher because they always belittle you
50. If the teachers found out what I really think, they would use it against me
51. TAFE would be better cause they treat you more like adults
52. Teachers don't understand us cause we do things differently
53. Teachers push you until you snap
54. We are not free to make mistakes and learn from it

Identity

55. It's not cool to be clever
56. Getting paid out for being smart mostly happens in Year 8 and 9
57. Its good to be clever, but you don't have to be a nerd

58. Sometimes you don't do your work because you don't want to be seen as different from your friends
59. Nerds or squares do nothing but school work
60. Being smart has nothing to do with it, some students just get paid out
61. Because of my reputation I get accused of things before anyone else
62. You stuff up once and they think you're bad all the time
63. When a teacher hears bad things about you, they expect you to behave that way

Compliance

64. There is one kind of perfect person and everyone has to be like that
65. The school likes to show off their best students to show us the way we should be
66. It's like the school is trying to put you down if you're not as good as the best students
67. If you get forced to do work you don't want to do it
68. Girls know how to suck up better
69. Girls get better marks cause they're neater, do boarders, and all that stuff
70. Girls don't say what they think because they want to keep a good reputation
71. It's hard not to talk at all in a whole lesson
72. I just don't care about homework
73. Sitting still, not talking and getting the work done in class is not a problem for me
74. Girls like to sit and do the work

Interest

75. It's easier to work hard in subjects you like
76. There's too much theory and not enough practical work
77. You learn a lot more from doing things
78. Teachers should make the work more interesting
79. Teachers make the work boring
80. Using computers makes the work more interesting
81. I get lazy when I don't like what I'm doing

Relevance

82. Most of the stuff we do at school has nothing to do with everyday life
83. You don't need to understand the work because you'll never use it
84. Some subjects aren't hard, they are just not relevant
85. We do the same thing over and over again. It's pointless and so repetitive
86. Teachers repeat themselves because they think you don't understand
87. School work should be related to real jobs

Success

88. You can be successful even if you don't do well at school
89. To be successful in a lot of jobs you don't need school
90. Finishing Year 12 doesn't mean that you will be successful
91. To be successful you've got to have a life
92. Because of the subjects I don't like, I'm not successful at school
93. Getting good marks is not as important as having a life
94. If you don't understand the work, it's because you're slack
95. I am already more successful than my parents because I have done more schooling
96. Kids drop out not because they're scared to fail, they just know they won't succeed

Direction

97. It would be good to spend some time at uni so that we knew what we were aiming for
98. Its not that we don't want to be smart, its just that we can't be bothered
99. The sooner I leave school the better
100. Years 8, 9 and 10 are a waste of time
101. There are not enough goals in Years 8, 9 and 10
102. Years 10, 11 and 12 should be in a separate senior school
103. I come to school because I want to get a good job
104. As you get older your priorities change and getting good marks becomes more important
105. I'd rather be at work, TAFE, or a senior school after Year 9
106. SACE should start in Year 10 to spread the work load and make Year 10 useful (skip if you don't know what SACE is)
107. School is only about getting the marks you need to get a good job, it's not about learning
108. It's not until Year 11 that things start to get serious
109. There is no point in working hard because it doesn't lead to anything
110. I think it would be easier to do Year 12 later on, cause I can't really see a point in doing it now
111. I wouldn't like to come back to school, but I might want to do Year 12 later
112. I was thinking of being a teacher
113. Being organised is not the issue, I just don't value school work

Support

114. I don't feel like there is any real help at school
115. The school doesn't seem like they want to help you in any way
116. School says that they're preparing us for adulthood, what a joke
117. School should care more about education and less controlling your life
118. School doesn't help you get a job
119. At school they don't care if you don't understand what you're doing
120. Friends can often explain the work much better and quicker than the teacher
121. If you don't finish your work, school doesn't give a shit, you just get a zero or marked down
122. As you get older there is more work and less help
123. Teachers don't see how you don't understand stuff
124. Teachers don't like helping you outside of lessons
125. Most teachers are just like robots, they do the work, get paid, go home
126. Most teachers don't care what you think or what you feel
127. Teachers don't really help you, they just put stuff up on the board, they don't explain things properly
128. Teachers should listen more
129. Teachers try to help you if you get in trouble
130. Teachers just mark tests and give them back, they don't discuss them with you

Time commitment/Work Load

131. When you've got heaps of homework you're all stressed and the next day you feel tired and negative
132. The work load is often impossible because assignments come all at once
133. Teachers load up the work deliberately to put you under pressure
134. School work should only be done at school

135. We shouldn't need to have homework on weekends and holidays
136. It's bad enough that we have to put up with the teacher's shit all day but to give us more work for home is just too much
137. Homework means you can't have a life
138. Homework is more important than having a social life after school
139. There are other things in my life that are more important to me than getting the homework done
140. They burn you out to get you ready for Year 12, that's why I'm not going to do it
141. I'm usually too tired to do the homework properly
142. Homework is never my best work
143. Homework gets in the way of family life
144. Because I always leave my work to the last minute it's never the best I can do

Environment

145. It's a lot easier to learn in classes where people don't stuff around
146. TAFE is for people that are dumb
147. It's hard to organise my time cause there's too much to do
148. Group work is good, you still talk to your mates but you get more work done
149. The people I hang around with want to do the work which makes it easier to study
150. Because we waste so much time at school, the teacher makes you take the work home
151. Teachers give too much attention to people that are bad
152. All the library books are all old
153. I don't use the library cause the librarian is too bossy

School

154. School is like a prison
155. School is okay, it just needs to be more relaxed
156. There are good things about school but the bad things outweigh the good
157. The only good thing about school is my social life
158. If I could do home schooling for part of the week, it would solve many of my problems
159. School comes last because I value all the other things I do more
160. Kids are having problems at school cause there are not enough teachers and resources
161. Girls and boys should be divided into separate classes
162. Most boys don't do drugs
163. Drugs are not an issue in boys education
164. I always try to avoid using the toilets at school
165. The school makes too much fuss about cigarettes

Computers

166. If work is written up on computer you get more marks
167. I seem to think more about the work on computer
168. Computers are good because they make your work neater
169. If I do it on computer I put more effort into the presentation
170. We should all have our own laptop computers in school
171. Computers teach me how to spell better than anybody
172. Computers are the way of the future
173. Computers at school are a waste of time because nothing ever works

174. There is no point using computers at school because there are too many restrictions
175. I mostly use computers at home
176. Teachers don't know much about computers and they won't let you tell them

Parents

177. My parents are more up to date than teachers
178. My parents just believe what the teachers say
179. My parents get more worried about detention than I do
180. My parents don't care what the school says about me
181. My parents don't think that school is very important
182. My parents would like me to do well but they don't like me having homework
183. My parents let me run my own life
184. I want to leave school but my parents won't let me
185. I don't get any support from my parents, they don't understand the system
186. My parents think school is too important
187. My parents will even lie to get me out of trouble

About how many hours a week would you spend (leave it blank if you don't do the activity):

Playing sport for the school ☐
Playing sport outside of school ☐
Being tutored ☐
Working in a part time job ☐
Practising a musical instrument ☐
Any other weekly commitments ☐

I'd rather do Year 12 at:

Uni ☐ TAFE ☐ Online ☐ This school ☐ At a senior school campus ☐

Have you been sent out of the classroom during the past week for behaviour reasons? Yes / No

If yes, for about how many hours ☐

List the subjects that you do, then rate them and indicate why

Leave it blank if you don't do the subject. If a subject is not listed, use the blank spaces provided.

	The subject is ...		**Because of the ...**	
	Good	**Bad**	**Work**	**Teacher**
English	5 —— 4 —— 3 —— 2 —— 1		5 —— 4 —— 3 —— 2 —— 1	
	5 —— 4 —— 3 —— 2 —— 1		5 —— 4 —— 3 —— 2 —— 1	
	5 —— 4 —— 3 —— 2 —— 1		5 —— 4 —— 3 —— 2 —— 1	

- Thank you for completing this survey -

Learning partnerships in rural early childhood settings

Kennece Coombe and Joy Lubawy
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Abstract

In educational settings, there has been a move towards developing learning communities. The works of Senge (1992) and Sergiovanni (1994, 1999) for example, have pointed to the advantages for organisations of developing an ethos approaching that of a learning community. Harris (1999) takes this further when she identifies a number of different types of learning community. When these identifiers were applied to early childhood settings in one rural city, it was found that although the directors were keen to involve families and children as part of a learning community approach, the result more often took on the characteristics of 'partnership'. Partnerships encouraged collaboration and consultation but the final arbiter was the director. The predominant aim of this paper is to report on a project which sought to elicit from a group of directors information about their practices and whether these practices might fit within the framework of a learning community or a learning partnership.

Introduction

The facilitation of learning communities in early childhood offers the opportunity for continued learning and development for all stakeholders within the service. Popular forms of inservice professional development are not easily accessible for teachers working in early childhood services beyond the geographical boundaries of major centres. Even then, the information that is offered tends to be metrocentric in its orientation and ignores the lived realities of professionals working in isolation from their peers.

The focus on learning in preschools particularly has focussed on the needs of children. Recent literature however has broadened this attention to meeting the needs also of parents and teachers. The development of learning communities in education promotes shared responsibility for the well-being of community members. In such a way, it is anticipated that membership of the learning community will result in benefits for all stakeholders. The learning community of the adult world also supports the learning community of the child. For children, there is the opportunity to direct their own learning; for parents, there is an acceptance of their role in children's lives and in the educational setting; for educators, there is the opportunity to reduce stress-related burnout and to promote more effective reflective practice.

Literature review

The literature pertinent to this project is that which encompasses the areas of learning communities, the needs of children and parents in educational settings, the professional development of teachers in the early childhood area, and the overlap of these three components.

In early childhood education, there appears to be a universal acknowledgement of the principles of Reggio Emilia in the broader context of an emergent curriculum. Katz and Chard (1996) point out that "the municipal preprimary schools in the northern city of Reggio Emilia have been attracting worldwide attention for more than a decade". They indicate that the Reggio Emilia Approach contributes greatly to children's learning because children feel that their work is valued, parents have an opportunity to become "deeply aware of their children's experience in the school" (p. 2) and teachers can "reflect on the work in progress and the discussion which surrounded it" (p. 2).

While it should not be discounted that exposure to such principles has enhanced early childhood educators' perceptions of what constitutes good practice with children, the researchers undertaking the present project hold to the view that other members of the learning community need to be considered with similar care and focus. Karr and Landerholme (1996) point out that teachers have been encouraged to include parents in their centres. The research conducted by these authors however indicates that teachers may expect all parents to become partners with them in teaching their children and then become frustrated when they don't. Teachers tend to blame themselves for failing in their duties. The researchers suggest that neither teachers nor parents need to feel any failure if parents participate only in support activities. Rather, there is more likely to be a sense of success for both groups, which, in turn, acts to reduce stress and ultimately benefits the children.

When teachers are feeling supported in the workplace, they are less likely to suffer from the negative stress that appears to be so prevalent in early childhood settings. This is clearly indicated in the literature that points to the levels of staff burnout as well as that which indicates parental concern with the quality and appropriateness of early care and education. Hill (1995) points out that when teachers feel challenged, in control of their lives and have a sense of belonging, they are more able to be a strong attachment figure for children.

Perhaps the most telling research into stress and staff burnout amongst those who work with young children is that by Manlove (1994). She considered three aspects of staff burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and levels of personal accomplishment. Similarly, Warnemuende (1996) identifies the characteristics of charisma, idealism, perfectionism and goal-orientation as the front-runners for encouraging stress and burnout. She suggests that taking a proactive role to gain control over the stress by altering the work situation will help to avoid burnout. Such factors as those identified by both Manlove and Warnemuende are exaggerated in settings where the teacher alone has to bear the emotional as well as physical responsibility for the entire group.

The implications from the research of each of the authors referred to here can be addressed in the learning community. Raywid (1993) for example, identifies six qualities of communities in schools: respect, caring, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment and commitment. Coombe (1999) advocates that "in a learning community, the ethic of caring should predominate ... as a genuine commitment to the well-being of others" (p. 95). Within the learning community, there is developed the notion of mutuality of caring. Coombe (1999) suggests that: parents have the right to hold the expectations that they, as parents, will have the opportunity to grow and develop through their association with the learning community; children become self-directed learners; and teachers benefit from collegial reflection to refresh themselves professionally.

Such views reflect the findings of Copley and Padron (1997) and of the Aspen Systems Corporation (1997a), which indicate that in a learning community, teachers have the opportunity to participate in a variety of professional development activities and learning opportunities. The Aspen Systems Corporation (1997b) also identified nine action tools to support learning communities in early childhood education which target continuing professional development of staff; building partnerships with parents and strengthening parents' advocacy skills.

In particular, it is the notion of social support that is the foundation of the learning community. Writing over a century ago, Tönnies (1887 cited in Sergiovanni, 1994) identified the stresses implicit in moving from close social relationships of community (gemeinschaft) to a more structured society and work environment (gesellschaft). Sergiovanni (1994) points out that in such a shift, community values are replaced by contractual ones. He draws on the work of Tönnies to elaborate three forms of community: community of kinship, of place, and of mind:

> *Community by kinship emerges from the special kinds of relationships among people that create a unity of being similar to that found in families and other closely knit collections of people. Community of place emerges from the sharing of a common habitat or locale. This sharing of place with others for sustained periods of time creates a special identity and a shared sense of belonging. Community of mind emerges from the binding of people to common goals, shared values, and shared conceptions of being and doing. Together the three represent webs of meaning that tie people together by creating a sense of belonging and a common identity.*
>
> (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 219)

Harris (1999) discusses six qualifiers of learning communities: Reflective communities which encourage insights into strengths and weaknesses as learners; Developmental communities that acknowledge differences in the ways individuals learn; Diverse communities where talents are recognised and impact upon decisions about curriculum, teaching and assessment; Conversational communities involving active discourse and exchange of ideas and values; Caring communities which encourage shared respect and helping others grow as learners; and, Responsible communities where teachers, pupils and parents come to view themselves as part of a social web of meanings and responsibilities.

The qualifiers offered by Harris along with the definitive statements from Sergiovanni and others point to broad support for the theoretical value of learning communities as settings of mutual caring, empowerment and involvement. The research discussed here seeks to develop this theory and then to make a practical nexus between the theory and the realities of early childhood settings in the Riverina region.

Research plan, methods and techniques

The research incorporated survey, interview, workshops and focus group techniques. The staged introduction of each of these techniques was designed to ensure a cohesive action research program. Each component fed into subsequent sections. For example, the first round survey offered direction for the initial workshop which was open to all early childhood professionals in the Riverina catchment. The evaluation focus group comprising five educators followed the first workshop and directed the planning for the second workshop. In this way, the ongoing research incorporated a direct response to the professional development needs of the teachers in the journey towards a learning community. At the time of writing the final evaluation is yet to be conducted. Predominantly for this reason, the results presented here are derived only from the survey round.

The survey

The survey was distributed to 15 Directors in the Wagga Wagga region in December 1999, nine replies were received. All of the directors were women. Participants could choose to respond in writing or by receiving a phone call from one of the researchers who then recorded verbal comments. The responses were coded to fit the six qualifiers identified by Harris and these will be used to frame the remainder of this report. The names that have been applied in this report are fictitious and designed to mask the real identity of the directors.

a. Reflective communities

Reflective communities focus on determining strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. Only one of the directors indicated that she undertook to identify the general strengths and weaknesses of herself and her staff on a formal basis. All other directors reported that they used a more informal process. Ashlee, for example, said that the teachers in her centre identified strengths and weaknesses as teachers in,

> *So many ways. We prefer to do this in a subtle, gentle and supportive way. We prefer this to a bureaucratic, formal paperwork type of way – AND IT WORKS WELL FOR US. WE HAVE A HAPPY LONG-SERVING TEAM OF PEOPLE.* (Her upper case)

Danielle explained the informality of her observations as:

> *During informal chats we often talk about how someone handled an activity well or presented a group or handled a tricky situation. We probably focus on the positives and don't really evaluate the negatives.*

Barbara had a different approach. She wrote:

> *I myself continuously evaluate my strengths and weaknesses. I mainly focus on my weaknesses. I also look at others' strengths and weaknesses. From these observations of staff's strengths and weaknesses, I then model the appropriate behaviour. ...[I do this through] mainly evaluation of discussions about issues. Depending on the situation, I usually praise staff for their positive efforts (strengths). In regard to weaknesses, I ask the staff the reason behind this and then take on board their comments. I state why it needs to be done this way giving justification for my decisions.*

The question of identifying the *learning* strengths and weaknesses of self and staff elicited a range of comments. Danielle, for example, was almost nonplussed, "Mmm! Good question! I'm not sure that I have ever done this with my staff." Leonora said, "We regularly comment on things we learn as we are teaching the children; we become aware of weaknesses when we can't answer the children's questions."

Jill's centre took a more active approach to learning. Jill indicated,

> *We do reflect on our own learning. We evaluate it through parental feedback amongst other things. We're willing to learn. I'll tell you, new eyes are great. They see things we're not even aware of. Prac students too bring yummy ideas.*

Similarly Caroline reported that staff in her centre continued their learning through reading, "various articles and reference materials. We attend seminars/workshops to develop skills."

The reflective component of the learning community then, has some merit for the preschool. Areas that require development and definition though, appear to be those wherein staff are encouraged to reflect methodically, collegially and with purpose. This is so, both in terms of identifying strengths and weaknesses and acting to improve practice based on these reflections.

b. Developmental community

There is some overlap between this form of community and the reflective one. Specifically, the ways in which the centres sought to acknowledge differences and then to use them to effect included:

> *K's strength is in music. She teaches me a lot of ideas from other places. You won't ever know everything, but working, as a team is fantastic with different teaching styles – so it's not just my voice and my methods.* (Clare)

- *Role modelling, guidance and support*
- *I use these in planning – who does what and rotate it*
- *Identifying these with my own learning style directs my finding alternative supplementary teaching strategies.* (Natasha)

> *We utilise different abilities of staff to use everyone's strengths; Also try to work on each other's weaknesses – support each other and advise.* (Leonora)

> *Yes. We use a lot of team teaching and this way staff can be the team leader when it is a topic or activity where they are very confident or, vice versa, they can be the person in the background.* (Danielle)

The developmental community appears to be highly dependent on in-house strategies or serendipitous learning in a process of teaching by doing rather than necessarily by justifying, explaining or theorising.

Diverse communities

Diverse communities, as the name implies, concern themselves with recognising differences in order to address particular needs and interests. This is closely reflected in curriculum development, whose decisions count when it comes to deciding important components of the curriculum and the flexibility that is permitted within that structure. The directors were asked about how they organised the curriculum, who determined the content, how did they respond to differences in learning of individual children and how the curriculum responded to the different talents and interests of children, staff and parents.

Without exception, the directors indicated that they, personally, determined the curriculum. Some justified this stance by pointing out that they had the qualifications and experience to do this. One director, Natasha, averred that she strives to:

- Implement latest research/ staff development eg Macquarie Uni conferences or literature/art;
- Curriculum determination varies according to interests of staff, children and parents, combined with constructionist theory of learning and learning styles of children in front of me in terms of child development and child centredness.

In terms of responding to differences, the directors acknowledged that first one has to know what the interests are and then to cater for them. Clare, for example, mentioned that she had attended a kinesiologist in-service and so felt comfortable using the techniques of focussing. She said, "You have to know who are visual learners and just be aware of how children learn." Natasha's strategy for tuning in to children's needs was a three-fold one:

- *by knowing my children well and their families;*
- *by analysing their individual learning styles; and*
- *forming positive relationships with each child – community awareness.*

The directors' responses to the different talents and interests of children, parents and staff that are available within the community was almost universally to use whatever help they could get.

> *I use everyone's talents that are on offer. Grandparents and so on. They stay around and talk about what they have. I take whatever I can from whomever I can. It's important to know about their interests and backgrounds.* (Clare)

There was also that sense of trying to keep people involved through:

- *discussion/sharing real life happenings;*
- *opportunity to bring/tell us of interests/happenings (at the door stuff); and*
- *listening to all! Follow up -> research -> check out how peers have extended interests.* (Natasha)

> *Incorporating talents, interests into the program. Inviting them to share their talents and interests at any time. Sharing knowledge, comparing own experiences, researching to find more information.* (Leonora)

> *By allowing people to participate in curriculum decisions, teaching and assessment at a level they feel comfortable with (recognising and accepting different abilities, training and qualifications).* (Elizabeth)

> *Offer time, resources and opportunities to allow these to be further developed.* (Caroline)

Analysis of the diverse community component points to a need to spread some power and control and the associated responsibilities. There is the opportunity to encourage proactive responses from staff and parents as well as a far greater openness to the interests and needs of children.

Conversational communities

A conversational community relies heavily on an active discourse and an exchange of ideas and values. The conversational community appears to be effected in these preschools through the now-traditional forms of newsletters and noticeboards but also incorporate:

> *Suggestion book for parents; children's groups where children are encouraged to work collaboratively and to share ideas.* (Bernadine)

> *Parent/teacher chats; lots of talking and discussion.* (Caroline)

> *Conversation, communication, gestures.* (Elizabeth)

> *We encourage children's ideas mainly through communication and play. When I say communication, it's mainly conversation and listening. We also encourage children's learning by providing open-ended activities as well as questioning techniques. I encourage staff feedback and ideas and then usually state my justification. I encourage conversation with parents to gain ideas and background information and to get something of an idea of where they're coming from.* (Barbara)

The conversational community appears to be well-developed though there may need to be further consideration of effective listening in order to foster feelings of empowerment and ownership in others, so that the teachers are able to be more in tune with the community of which they are but a part.

Caring communities

It is perhaps the caring community with which early childhood educators most closely identify. Caring communities encourage shared respect and help other to grow as learners. This is reflected in some ways by the Reggio Emilia concept of 'images of the child' wherein the child is seen as able, having knowledge and capable of expressing ideas. The caring community however goes beyond a focus only on the child and recognises similar characteristics for other members of the community. The directors were asked to comment on how the members of their centre help each other to grow as learners.

The predominant responses from the directors included notions of communication and sharing. For example, the response from Leonora provided a good summary of the general ideas of the group. She pointed out that the members of her community enjoy, "Providing and swapping ideas, knowledge and resources; giving each other advice etc; sharing interesting information and topics of interest and objects etc.". Comments of a similar nature were made by others:

> *Everyone contributes and passes on knowledge. We have no forum for parents to formally share ideas but they do it informally. We have regular parent meetings and a parent library.* (Clare)

> *We work towards the same goals, supporting each other and sharing the roles amongst the staff. We encourage children to help each other by*

> *getting a friend to help and we praise contributions to the kindy by members of the community.* (Jill)

> *We have open communication amongst all. We use displays of what we've been doing.* (Bernadine)

The use of the ascription, 'caring community', is something of a tautology in the parlance of early childhood settings. It contains within it the universal attributes of the interdependence of members, the giving and receiving caring/ sharing/ nurturing relationships and a positive approach to working with young children and their families. The comments made by the directors involved in the study were useful in explicating this phenomenon.

Responsible communities

The final form of learning community identified by Harris is that of the responsible community. The responsible community is one in which teachers, pupils and parents come to view themselves as part of a social web of meanings and responsibilities. This community is of particular interest to those directors working in sole charge positions in rural settings. These teachers work in isolation from their professional peers. They take on the dual roles of management and leadership. It is this duality in particular which directors commented upon as resulting in stress and conflict. When asked to specify aspects of being a director in a rural early childhood setting which they found most demanding, the teachers commented:

> *It's not the children or the environment. It's the paperwork, paperwork. Things like the ASPARD funding document and applying for funding for children with special needs.* (Clare)

> *It's administration. It's out of control. Filling in bits of paper and having no money.* (Natasha)

> *Lack of time to do important things like researching, observations and programming. Instead, it's paperwork, administration duties that take the place of teaching duties.* (Bernadine)

> *Not sufficient time to get everything done during normal working hours.* (Elizabeth)
>
> *It's hard to get the balance right between home and work especially when personal expectations are 150%.* (Jill)

On the other hand, the directors also pointed to the value of partnerships and shared values. The comments they made in relation to these issues included:

> *It's good to make them feel that they have ownership in the centre – a sense of value/belonging to the centre. Their talents are used. There's a diverse range of backgrounds.* (Clare)
>
> *The parents are reading/witnessing/listening to me and the staff. They are valuing the uniqueness and creativity of the children especially their artworks.* Elizabeth)
>
> *We've encouraged this by aesthetic display and have given suggestions about how to care for/ preserve the works. The parents continue to provide blank pieces of paper to their children even when they leave preschool.* (Natasha)
>
> *It's great when you get the message through that play is fabulous. We have parent nights, and come and play days. We explain what the children are doing. ... The teacher needs to have a 'have-a-go' approach but also be able to delegate and share with realistic expectations.* (Jill)

Although the teachers did recognise that there were boundaries of confidentiality and professional accountabilities which prevented a total sharing of responsibility within their centres, they acknowledged the benefits of 'sharing the load' both in terms of reduced stress for teachers and empowerment of other stakeholders.

Concluding comments

In a region such as the Riverina, early childhood educators have limited opportunities for professional development. Throughout the conduct of the research, the teachers were drawn into a learning community and recognised the value of including other stakeholders in the shared decision-making. They recognised that open communication amongst and between stakeholders is necessary for a successful emergent curriculum that can respond to, support and extend children's learning in an environment in which adults and children work in partnership.

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Cut your teeth on online collaborative projects

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Abstract

Online collaborative curriculum projects (OCCP) are an important component of the digital curriculum. They provide powerful learning tools that engage students and provide PD&T opportunities for teachers new to online learning.

The management and development of the very successful Connecting The Kids component of Centenary of Federation SA's Connecting The Continent event http://www.connectingthecontinent.com/ will be used to illustrate the way teachers and students can benefit by incorporating OCCP in their teaching and learning program.

Introduction

Online collaborative projects allow teachers and students to enhance and enrich the curriculum they value. An online collaborative project is generally based on sound curriculum and not on the use of technology. The use of technology should be seamless and an inherent part of the process. Successful online collaborative projects utilise the many modes of communication the Internet offers, to help students achieve the stated outcomes of the curriculum, often by means other than those of the traditional classroom setting.

They are activities for students with the following characteristics:

- their objectives and activities support curriculum outcomes;
- they use online technologies (particularly email and the www) to support learning and to encourage communication beyond the classroom;
- they enable access by students to experiences and contacts that bring the world beyond the classroom into sharper focus; and
- they promote communication and collaboration within and across classrooms, schools, the nation and internationally.

Through involvement in an **online collaborative project**, students and teachers may be involved in exploring, observing, recording, constructing, problem solving, sharing, discussing, hypothesising, predicting, cooperating and understanding. Behind such online collaborations many valuable skills and understandings are developed. It is at the classroom level however, where most of the work is undertaken by both the students and the teacher.

Connecting The Continent http://www.connectingthecontinent.com commemorated the role of telecommunications in nation building, from the Overland Telegraph to the future of the information revolution. From 18 June to 1 July 2001 the site featured an exciting live on-line event unlike any held before.

The general community at large:

- listened to amazing stories and tall yarns;
- watched as web cams reveal daily life in outback Australian communities;
- tuned into the Pt Augusta School of the Air as it provided lessons by radio;
- joined in our fascinating forums;
- met outback identities;
- discovered the intriguing history of Australia's most captivating communities;
- participated in a webquest activity and online forums and chats; and
- used downloadable lessons to teach about nation building, heritage and local history.

Connecting The Kids accessed through *Connecting The Continent* featured many exciting interactive activities for students and teachers developing and expanding students' experience of online communication and creating an interactive learning environment.

Students, particularly those between Years 4 - 10 used the activities in *Connecting The Kids* to begin to investigate federation and telecommunication issues by involving themselves in the:

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- webquest;
- downloadable lesson plans;
- teacher activity centre;
- mystery photo/sound competitions; and
- online forums.

The major aim of *Connecting The Kids* was to maximise the uptake of 'best practices' with online learning technologies across the system to celebrate 100 years since Australia's Federation.

For **students** engaged in the project this meant:

- enhanced understanding of Federation;
- purposeful engagement with online technologies to communicate and collaborate with peers and experts;
- purposeful use of online technologies to develop information literacy skills in a meaningful, relevant and exciting context; and
- development of problem solving skills in an online environment.

Teachers facilitating students' learning at the school site gained:

- support to amplify and extend their ICT skills in a purposeful context; and
- an enhanced understanding of how to design and manage online projects in their classrooms.

Teacher activity centre

An important part of any OCCP is a section for the teacher. *Connecting The Kids* contained project, teacher and student outcomes, timelines, intended audience, how to prepare for the event, information on how to run a webquest, participate in online discussions and offered help on using email, the www, forum and chat. A feature was the downloadable lesson plans developed on the OTL, telecommunications and the cultural heritage of outback SA, all written for a multi-age audience and capturing the requirements of the newly completed South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA).

There was also a *Daily News* page to provide regular updates and news about the educational activities on the accompanying roadshow and a *Discovery* page for students to solve puzzles online. A major activity was a *Webquest* and the opportunity to listen to live streaming audio from Pt. Augusta School Of The Air and see and hear local students and community identities through streaming video. An Online Forum took visitors to a site consisting of discussion and chat rooms hosted by EdNA Online.

What we have learnt

There can be several discernible barriers to teachers and students becoming involved in online curriculum projects. These include:

- teachers and students unfamiliar with online projects;
- inflexible school timetables preventing access to computers;
- lack of up-todate computers, connectivity and bandwidth; and
- other technical difficulties.

These barriers are often overwhelming and beyond the time available to a busy teacher.

What helps to increase success and improve learning with OCCP is preparation and participation. This includes, selecting a projects, planning, selecting appropriate methods of delivery to students, networking with other teachers and students, being active throughout the project and managing learning.

Connecting The Kids enabled students and teachers to participate in non threatening online activities where they could meet online, exchange information and understandings about telecommunications and nation building. Students also contributed materials to their community web site. A range of successful forums engaged students in conversations with a range of special guests.

There were 3.3 million hits to the *Connecting The Continent* website over the one month period of the event. Over 8 000 users accessed the website each day. The *Connecting The Kids* website was the most popular page visited on the website. Over

150 schools registered for the event. The state/territory breakdown can be seen in the table below.

State/ Territory	Number of Schools
ACT	0
NSW	5
NT	10
Qld	20
SA	85
Tas	2
Vic	5
WA	8
Overseas	15
TOTAL	150

Teacher perspective

From the teachers' perspective the project provided a real example of how learning technologies can be integrated into everyday teaching. *Connecting The Kids* was based on sound educational pedagogy, providing an excellent model of what learning technologies and networked learning can achieve in the classroom setting. In addition, the project provided the environment for the development and strengthening of online teacher networks. These networks can be utilised and capitalised upon in future projects.

Feedback from participants was very positive:

- schools who participated – visited the site most every day;
- teachers checked emails and *What's New* daily;
- teachers and students found the website, the *Webquest, Forum* and *Max Maze* the most effective learning activities;
- all teachers used the online *Teacher Activity Centre*;
- the most effective support were email list, website and PO contact; and

- teachers developed several new ACT skills, viz. using online forums, email, webquests audio, panoramas and webcams in lessons.

What we have learnt

- need a large lead-in time;
- use a variety of tools to promote to schools;
- provide support to teachers through a variety of sources;
- teachers/students need as much access as possible to computers;
- teachers who asked questions, explored the site, used the materials sent to them and planned work around CTK were more successful; and
- teachers use online curriculum projects in several different ways.

Bridging studies: An alternative pathway to university for rural Australians

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Abstract

Over the past decade bridging programs at a regional university campus have provided additional opportunities for educationally disadvantaged mature-age rural people to bridge the gap to higher education. They have also given school leavers a second chance to gain university entrance. From 2000 the campus has offered a single generic bridging program to prepare students for a range of degree and diploma studies. The early stages of this research project explored the views of current undergraduate students and of graduates who had earlier successfully completed a bridging program. Tape-recorded focus group discussions, facilitated by the researchers, provided a wealth of data. The results of a more recent survey of Whyalla Bridging Program students towards the end of their bridging studies underline the value of the Program to those who set out on this pathway. The researchers have been involved in teaching and supporting the learning of bridging students and of students in their subsequent undergraduate studies. The paper describes the challenges and rewards of the Program from both staff and student perspectives, and highlights the lessons learned from the project. From these come insights of value to those involved in contributing to the learning environment of current and future bridging cohorts and of students in similar programs in other places.

Introduction

Bridging education has for a number of years been one means of meeting the particular needs of educationally disadvantaged people. In regional areas, without the range of other options that may be found in more populous areas, it has proved its value in providing an alternative pathway to university, and giving a second chance for a higher education to people who have suffered educational disadvantage and/or disenchantment. These have included people of mature age who have earlier not had opportunities to continue with formal education, as well as discouraged school leavers. This has also been the experience in Whyalla, a provincial city of population 23000, situated 400 kilometres (by road) north-west of metropolitan Adelaide.

This paper gives an outline of Bridging education over the years at the Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia and its predecessor the South Australian Institute of Technology and describes the current Whyalla Bridging Program and its student cohort. Lessons drawn from the various stages of a research project conducted during 2000 are compared and the transformative nature of such adult learning experiences is highlighted.

Whyalla bridging programs

Bridging education began at Whyalla Campus in 1988 with a Foundation Course in Social Studies that also ran in 1989 and prepared mature-aged students for undergraduate studies in Social Work. This was a response to the realisation of the presence of many mature-aged prospective students in the surrounding region who were barred from university study by their lack of educational background and skills. In 1990 the Foundation Course became the Human Services Bridging Program, preparing students also for Nursing studies. Other Bridging programs that operated in earlier years were the Associate Diploma Bridging Course (preparing students for diploma studies in Business and Computing), the Applied Science and Engineering Bridging Course and the Business Studies Bridging Program. The Whyalla programs, the only internal regional university Bridging programs in South Australia, have now been subsumed into a common Whyalla Bridging Program that provides entrance to most discipline areas (Nursing, Social Work, Business/Accounting, Computing and Communication and Media Management).

The normal entry requirement for bridging programs at Whyalla Campus has been for students to have been out of secondary school for at least two years. In some cases where students have unsuccessfully attempted the last year of secondary schooling and there is room in the program they will also be considered. Entrance testing was discontinued some years ago out of concern that it might be discouraging suitable applicants. The program is free of Higher Education Contribution Scheme fees – the students have only to pay the Student Amenities Fee and buy textbooks as required. The current program is offered as day-time on-campus classes of three hours per course, the courses (formerly called 'subjects') being two semesters each of Introductory Communications, Mathematics, Science or Australian Studies, and Computing. Students who wish to proceed to the Nursing program must choose Science. Therefore, full-time study requires 12 contact hours per week and significant additional time outside classes to complete tutorial exercises and assignments. The program may be studied part-time over two or more years.

These Whyalla bridging programs have tended to have a 40-50% student completion rate. In 1999 and 2000, there were around 50 commencing students in bridging program/s with about 25 completing and being eligible for undergraduate places. Interestingly, only about 20 each year chose to accept these places. The 2001 bridging cohort consisted of 33 students who enrolled at the start of Semester 1, reducing to 27 over the first six weeks of the program. Females have always outnumbered males in the program, and that is also the case in 2001 where the ratio is 2:1. Ages extend from recent school leavers to over 60 year olds. There is a range of ethnicities, including one Indigenous student. A feature of the bridging programs has been their ability to attract students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Other equity groups represented include rural students (naturally) and also students with disabilities.

The research project

Beginning early in 2000, the research project focused on the role of Whyalla bridging education in developing lifelong learners and providing an expanded range of future opportunities. The members of the research team had all been involved to varying extents in coordinating, teaching courses and providing support to Bridging students, and so reflection on this accumulated experience was an important part of the project (Cooper, Ellis, & Sawyer, 2000a). To gather data concerning student perspectives, people who had successfully completed past Whyalla bridging programs were invited to comment on their experience. These 26 participants, all studying at the time in undergraduate programs or graduates of such programs, were invited to be involved in one of three focus groups facilitated by one or more of the researchers (Cooper, Ellis, & Sawyer, 2000b). The discussions, on the highs and lows of their bridging study experience and an assessment of the extent to which it had prepared them for subsequent university study, were tape-recorded. The following questions guided the discussions:

1. What influence has Bridging study had on your life (personal, study, other)?
   (a) Negative impacts (b) Positive impacts
2. What aspects contributed to your success in Bridging?
   (a) Personal factors (b) Course-related factors
3. What challenges/obstacles did you experience in your Bridging year?
   (a) Personal matters (b) Course-related matters

4. How well did the Bridging course prepare you for your subsequent university study?

   (a) Helpful aspects (b) Problem areas (c) Suggestions for improvement

Main points were also written up on large sheets of paper so that the participants could refer back to earlier comments and add extra information. This survey approach using focus groups was chosen to obtain a breadth and depth of data, and the results obtained provided a wealth of information.

Invariably, the bridging experience was considered to be life changing for the students with both gains and losses identified in the focus groups including the negative impact of bridging study upon personal relationships. Many participants identified enhanced feelings of self-worth, increased confidence, greater tolerance of diversity and broadened interests attributable to their involvement in a bridging program. Some former bridging students in the focus groups expressed concern about the content and delivery of certain subjects and bridging programs that they had found to be less relevant to some fields of subsequent undergraduate studies. However, the general feeling was that Whyalla Campus was an appropriate setting for tertiary preparatory and alternative entry programs because of its small size, good facilities and location in an area with high unemployment and consequent demand for education.

Comments received from the focus groups formed the basis for the second stage of the project conducted later in 2000. The focus group questions were developed and expanded into a questionnaire for an anonymous survey of the year 2000 Bridging students, the first cohort of the single, generic program. Questionnaires were distributed to all students and also to others who had enrolled in 2000 but had withdrawn, either officially or informally. (See Appendix A.) This paper incorporates the results of this later survey, pointing out where they confirm focus group findings, and highlighting new insights.

Questionnaires were distributed to 32 students in the current Bridging program. A total of 12 useable responses were received, giving a response rate of only 37.5 per cent, despite e-mail and class reminders. The following tables indicate respondents' age range, activities prior to enrolment, and aims at commencement. All respondents were female and had English as their first language.

Table 1: Number and percentage of respondents by age

Age	Number	Per Cent
< 21 years	3	25
21 - 30	4	33
31 - 40	1	8
41 - 50	2	17
> 50 years	2	17

Table 2: Activities engaged in prior to Bridging Program

Response	N*
Finishing School	3
Working Part-time	3
Volunteer Work	2
Home Duties	2
Studying at TAFE	1
Nothing	1

* 'N' indicates the number of times the response was identified

Table 3: Aims at commencement of Bridging Program

Response	N *
Pass/finish the program	4
Study Nursing	3
Study Social Work	3
Keep occupied	1
Gain a job	1
No aims	1

* 'N' indicates the number of times the response was identified

Respondents were asked about the influence that bridging study had had on their lives so far. The strongest theme to emerge was that the respondents had increased in confidence and self-esteem. The Program provided them with motivation, stimulation, and incentive to strive. Comments were received that the Program has 'made me want to get more out of life'; 'has expanded my knowledge – given me so much confidence – taught me to value knowledge, access areas for better understanding'; and 'I am not scared of going to Uni any more'. The gaining of new friendships was also significant. The respondents frequently referred to meeting 'a lot of nice people who are now friends' and 'feeling better' about themselves as a result. However, the respondents also reported that their 'priorities had shifted'. The responses indicated that the demands of study took the students away from parenting duties in particular. They found their study homework 'time-consuming' and commented that it 'doesn't leave time for work, kids, partner, home'. Making a commitment to study and not being distracted by menial tasks not related to study was expressed as a concern. These responses align closely with those obtained in the earlier focus groups: there participants referred to their increased motivation for study and for life generally and an increased sense of self-worth; and they also talked of their changed patterns of behaviour at home and the pressures of work, home and family. While the focus group participants placed emphasis on changing relationships with existing partners and friends, this was not a factor mentioned by the current students, except in the context of having less time for these relationships and networks. Rather than receiving negative reactions, the current students reported that 'family are a great help', and that partners were 'helpful and supportive'. One respondent commented, 'If it wasn't for my mother and sister I would not be at uni', indicating that they help 'by giving me a little pusher to study'.

The content of some courses was perceived to be irrelevant to students' future requirements, and at times the pace of delivery was seen to be too fast. A comment was received that some lecturers 'seem to assume there has been prior experience when this is not the case for some students'. These comments align with focus group feedback mentioning particular problems for some students unfamiliar with new technology or lacking recent mathematics study. Interestingly, in those earlier findings negatives also concentrated mostly on course content and delivery. Forty-two per cent of the later respondents replied that they had felt like withdrawing from particular subjects or the whole course at some stage. It is noteworthy that the major reasons for this were course-related – concerns with particular content or lecturing staff.

The main reason these respondents continued in the program was a strong desire to succeed and realise their dreams of gaining a degree. Encouragement from other students was given as an important factor in their continuing with the program. This is consistent with the focus group findings, which reported that camaraderie was a factor that contributed to success in bridging studies.

With regard to what other things they would have liked in the course, the respondents suggested a workshop on how to study effectively and on how to access library resources on the computer. Interestingly, students requested the inclusion of introductory subjects related to their chosen future discipline area. In past programs this had been provided but was lost with the amalgamation of the discipline-specific courses into the more efficient generic program. Overall, however, the opinion was that the program did not need more content as it was already 'full on'. This is in contrast to previous findings that indicated that bridging workloads were light and an easy introduction to tertiary study.

The length of the course was considered to be 'a good length' and 'acceptable'. The class times were reported to be suitable, although a comment was made that 'more choices should be available'. The level of difficulty was generally perceived as increasing 'gradually'. Some respondents commented that the increase in difficulty in Semester 2 was 'too fast', particularly in the mathematics area.

Comments were requested in relation to the University facilities. The students were happy with the services provided by Campus Central, adding that 'the ladies are a great help and they are so friendly!' This was again expressed in relation to the library staff, although students often found the library 'confusing' and indicated that they required more direction in its use. The services provided by the Student Support Centre and those of the Student Association were also rated highly, with comments received such as 'excellent', 'great', 'helpful' and 'friendly'. The computer pools were generally regarded as 'good', and 'easy and accessible'. The accessibility of lecturers was also reported as 'great', 'good' and 'excellent'. Another comment received in relation to facilities and support was to have social activities such as quiz nights. These comments relate well to the feedback from the earlier focus groups where the positives of the learning environment usually included assistance from staff and the quality of campus facilities, but mention was made that there could be more activities for mature-age students.

Students reported that the best thing about being a student in the bridging program was 'understanding uni expectations before a degree' and knowing 'I will be ready for my course next year'. The comment was made that 'you get to make your mistakes early' and 'maybe do better in the degree'. Other commonly mentioned factors were 'meeting new people', 'making friends', and 'the support and encouragement' received. The impression gained was that the students believed that they would start their degree studies more confidently, having gained new skills and knowledge and the chance of getting future employment. The 'friendly environment' and the ease of integration as a mature-age student were other positive comments. One student specifically mentioned that 'age has not been a drawback with regard to coping with program'. On the other hand, the worst things about the program were considered to be the stress of the workload and 'high elevation' of learning with some lecturers not recognising students' needs. Time wasters and people talking in class were mentioned as problem areas to be remedied.

Respondents generally believed that the Bridging Program had prepared them well for future studies. Learning how to structure essays and reference appropriately for university studies were given as ways the Bridging Program helped. Getting to know the campus and making friends with people who would be in the same program in the future were additional factors mentioned. All respondents replied that they would recommend the Whyalla Bridging Program to other people. Some commented that they already had done so. Others added that their recommendation would include provisos such as 'only if no children and no commitments and not employed'. Comments included: 'It is a great opportunity to expand your horizons'; and 'it's been a great experience getting back into study mode and what better way than at Whyalla Campus – so accessible and excellent facilities'.

The research also aimed to capture data from people who had discontinued the bridging program, as this would have indicated ways of meeting the learning needs of an extended group. Questionnaires were posted to 23 students who had initially enrolled. However, only three responses from this cohort were received, and two were returned, the intended recipient being no longer at that address. Each of the three respondents had withdrawn before making a start on their study program. All respondents were female, aged between 31 and 50 and had English as their first language.

Only two useable questionnaires were received, from respondents who had previously been open learning students at TAFE, who wished to enter the Social Work degree at the University in the future, but chose to continue study at TAFE as a means of entry to the degree. One respondent enrolled but did not begin in the Bridging Program because she was unsure whether she could cope with the amount of study needed. She replied that 'fear' made her decide to leave the course. However, the additional comment was made that she would have 'loved to complete the course'. The other respondent preferred to continue to do open learning without the need to attend classes on campus. This respondent indicated that a mix of day and night classes would have suited her. Childcare was also a concern. Both respondents replied that they would recommend the Whyalla Bridging Program to other people.

A transforming experience

Mezirow (1991) has presented a model of 'transformative learning' that seems relevant to the findings from both stages of this research. He argues that the major development in any adult learning program is the transformation of learners' meaning perspectives or frame of reference. This process requires critical analysis of individual belief structures gained through socialisation during childhood. He claims that the transformation may be precipitated by a trauma or merely result from an illuminative discussion. In particular, safe, supportive and democratic environments are considered essential if students are to challenge their own thought processes. Aspects related to transformative learning may be identified in the findings throughout this project. Students have found their new studies a life-changing experience that has impacted on their identity and life outside of the study environment, necessitating a need for support. In the earlier research there were frequent references to supportive environments where lecturers were described as 'dedicated, nurturing and supportive'. (Quotations of student comments from the focus groups are documented in Cooper, Ellis & Sawyer, 2000b). In the later questionnaire feedback, support from staff was linked to feeling worthwhile and confident.

This research project has also identified some of the expected outcomes from this learning development that include alteration in the individual's sense of self and thinking processes. It is argued that transformative learning may involve 'changes in locus of control, personal competence or self concept' (Mezirow, 1991, p. 220). In both stages of this research project, there was evidence of students experiencing gains in assertiveness, self-worth and confidence as a result of bridging study. To quote a focus group participant: 'In your general life when you are out talking to people, you feel more confident'. This positive impact on students' lives was also identified in a study relating to a metropolitan foundation course (Beasley, 1997, p. 192).

There were also indications in the research findings of significant shifts in perspectives. Many participants in the first stage of the research project claimed that they developed wider interests and became more accepting of others and open-minded on issues. Similarly in the later stage of the research students identified changes in terms of gaining and valuing knowledge, improvements in self-esteem and confidence, and achievement of greater flexibility. These developments are characteristic of transformative learning, which broadens the learner's outlook as it 'moves the individual toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view) and integrated meaning perspective' (Mezirow, 1991, p. 7).

Developing student confidence and new ways of thinking have been among the objectives of bridging education at Whyalla from the beginning. In most programs, the aim has been to foster developmental learning that respects what people bring to their study and gradually challenges them more and more as the year progresses (Stevenson & Munn, 1990). However, it is apparent in the feedback gained in both stages of the research that students have not always experienced the teaching/learning approach as developmental. Students have complained about finding the pace too fast, dealing with assumptions about prior knowledge and the rapid increase in complexity in some content areas, in some years. They have also highlighted the problems of mature-age students unfamiliar with computer technology.

There are other aspects of transformative learning theory that may relate particularly to the female students' experience of bridging education. Morgan (Mezirow 1991, p. 169) studied women returning to education and found that there was identity development separate from their relationships, and also recognition that people can choose their ways of thinking. The negative impact on relationships that is highlighted by some of the participants may point to the development of a new and separate identity for the women undertaking bridging study that changes family dynamics. There was a comment in the earlier research that people in the students' networks thought that the students were 'going above them'. As Candy in *Self-Direction for Lifelong Learning* (cited by Cranton 1994, p. 18) comments:

> *If learning is not part of the cultural norm for a particular group, then the person seeking to emancipate himself or herself through self-education has first of all to transcend the indifference or even antagonism of those with whom she or he is regularly in contact.*

The extent of the transformation identified by the focus group participants and questionnaire respondents may also be due to the characteristics of the bridging students themselves. From our experience of interacting with bridging students and the research, it is apparent to us that the students often make considerable financial and other sacrifices to complete their program and for some it is a long-awaited opportunity to obtain the education they missed in their teenage years. Consequently, they tend to have an intrinsic motivation to learn and bring a lot of enthusiasm to their classes. In addition, broad age ranges and diversity of student backgrounds are often viewed by people as stimulating (Beasley, 1990), and the former bridging students in our research felt that this was so. Possibly because of commensurate ages, enthusiasm and diversity, there appears to be a particularly relaxed and egalitarian relationship that develops between bridging students and lecturers. Strong commitment from students to their bridging studies would seem to be an ideal condition for transformative learning to occur.

Conclusion

The Whyalla Campus of the University of South Australia has over a decade of experience with bridging education, and has given a range of non-traditional students a second chance to enter university. Strong demand from prospective students for the programs has been maintained, ensuring viable class sizes. There has been a 50 per cent completion rate in recent years and a large proportion of the successful students enter undergraduate programs at the campus.

The research was conducted in two stages during 2000, with former and current bridging students. The perspectives of the respondents were sought in regard to the strengths and limitations of the programs and the impact of bridging study on their lives. The feedback received from the earlier focus groups and the subsequent anonymous questionnaires was similar.

While the respondents in both stages of this research identified problems with the content and/or delivery of particular courses, they recognised the value of acculturation to a university environment before commencing degree study. They also highlighted the significant impact of bridging study on their lives. Of particular note is their feedback in terms of changes to self-concept and ways of thinking that indicate that in many instances the learning has been transformative. It is apparent that many students in their bridging year do more than accumulate useful knowledge and study skills; the development of inner strength, tolerance and flexibility are all essential for effective tertiary study and professional practice.

The insights gained from this research have been valuable in the development and selection of teaching and learning strategies for the 2001 program. There have already been adjustments to the content in some courses, and increased use of experiential learning methods. It is also important to take into consideration the positive feedback in order to ensure the maintenance of those aspects of the bridging learning environment that were appreciated by the students. The study confirmed the importance of bridging education at Whyalla in providing expanded educational opportunities through an alternative pathway to university for rural South Australians.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Whyalla Bridging Courses Project
(Current Whyalla Bridging Program students)

[More space was left on distribution copies]

Earlier this year we conducted a research project about Bridging courses at Whyalla Campus. It involved focus groups attended by former Whyalla Campus Bridging students who had successfully completed their course and qualified for admission to undergraduate courses at the Campus. The aim was to find out the impact their course had made on their lives, and how well it had prepared them for degree studies afterwards.

We would now like to give you, the current students of the Whyalla Bridging Program, an opportunity to have your say. We would like you to tell us about the impact of the course so far on your lives, and about some other course-related matters. Your comments will provide a useful contribution to future Bridging Program planning.

This study has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any questions about general aspects of the project, the Chair of that committee, Ms Linley Hartmann (telephone 8302 0327, internal extension 20327), will be available to discuss these matters. Please feel free to direct other queries to Bronwyn Ellis (telephone 8647 6001; internal extension 26001) or the other researchers.

Please take the time to complete the following short anonymous questionnaire. It should take no more than half an hour. It is of course completely voluntary. If you do not want to answer particular questions, feel free to omit them. If you want to write more than there is space for, please use the blank space at the end or attach an extra piece of paper.

Thank you for your participation and all the best!

Nancy Cooper, Bronwyn Ellis and Janet Sawyer

Profile of participant (please underline the answers that apply to you):

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age group: <21 21-30 31-40 41-50 >50
3. First language: English A language other than English

Your Bridging experience

1. What influence has Bridging study so far had on your life (personal, study, other)?
   Negative impacts
   Positive impacts

2. What aspects are contributing to your study success?
   Personal factors
   Course-related factors

3. What challenges/obstacles are you experiencing in your Bridging year?
   Personal matters
   Course-related matters

4. Have you ever felt like withdrawing from particular subjects or the whole course?

If yes, what made you feel that way?

What kept you going?

5. How well do you think the Bridging course so far has helped you to get used to further study in a university environment?

What other things do you wish were in the course?

Any other suggestions for improvement?

6. Any positive or negative comments on University facilities and support?

Campus Central
Library
Student Support Centre
Computer pools
Accessibility of lecturers
Student Association (USASA)

7. What do you think about the length of the course?

8. What do you think about class times?

9. Have you found that the level of difficulty is increasing gradually, too fast, or not at all?

10. What has been the best thing about being a student in the Bridging Program?

11. What were your aims when you began the Bridging course?

12. What are you hoping to do after completing the course?

13. Would you recommend the Whyalla Bridging Program to other people?

When you have filled in the questionnaire, please return it to Campus Central as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

THANK YOU!

[A similar questionnaire was distributed to students who had enrolled in 2000, but had discontinued. Questions were modified to fit their situation, and additional questions were: 'What did you go on to do after withdrawing from the course?' and 'Are you studying now, or do you think you'll study again? Uni? TAFE? Elsewhere?']

Regional university access: A case study from the south west

Robyn Eversole
(Edith Cowan University)

Abstract

Access to appropriate training is key for developing human resources and enhancing quality of life in regional areas. Yet like many other service providers, universities are faced with the high costs of delivering services in regions with a small and scattered client pool. Thus, the challenge: how can universities serve regional communities and promote regional development while remaining cost effective and sustainable? Distance education technologies appear to offer a solution, yet they may fail to respond to the on-the-ground needs of regional students.

In late 2000, Edith Cowan University commissioned a study to consider the challenge of regional service delivery, in the context of the Warren-Blackwood region of South West Australia. This isolated, inland region has been undergoing economic displacement in the wake of timber industry restructuring; improved training access has been identified as a regional-development priority (Warren-Blackwood Action Plan, 2000). This paper presents the results of the study examining the demand for, and delivery of, university services in the Warren-Blackwood region.

Surveys, focus groups and interviews with students and former students highlighted key trends, such as the pre-university (Year 10) exodus of youth from the region and the tendency for regionally based students to be mature-aged. The paper identifies challenges, both logistical and psychological, facing people who undertake long-distance university studies (whether as distance-ed or commuting students). Finally, the paper suggests low-cost ways to facilitate the learning experience of students based in regional areas, by understanding the culture of learning and providing access to basic support resources, regardless of the technological sophistication of course delivery.

Introduction

> *A well documented connection exists between educational achievement, labour market participation and later socio-economic status. Education is therefore one of the key 'equity' issues.* (McKenzie, 1990)

This paper addresses the need for access to quality tertiary education for regional and rural residents. Currently, universities in Australia face a tension between the desire to serve regional communities and the costliness of providing services to thinly populated areas. Access to metropolitan campuses is often difficult or impossible for people living in regional areas, yet the availability of quality education is a key ingredient in regional development.

Distance education technologies appear to offer a solution to universities that would reach out to rural and regional students; as Oblinger and Rush (1997) write,

> *The on-line experience allows colleges and universities to project themselves far beyond their physical locations. Already, hundreds of institutions offer courses on-line. Perhaps more appropriate for adult learners than the average 18-year old freshman, on-line experiences offer educational opportunities to millions of learners constrained by time, location or other factors.*

On-line learning, and the wide variety of other distance technologies, present considerable opportunities. Yet an on-the-ground analyses of students' own needs and experiences is necessary if such technologies are to be used most effectively to meet the needs of regional and rural Australian students.

This paper presents results from a recent study of university students and university service delivery in the Warren-Blackwood region, an isolated, inland region of South Western Australia.[1] The study focuses on both distance-education and commuting students living in the region, of all ages. These are all referred to as 'long-distance students' – whether they commute to campus or study externally. The study considers how local people in this region are currently accessing university-level training despite geographical isolation, the obstacles they face, and their recommendations for more effectively providing university services to rural and regional areas.

The distance education formats currently available in the Warren-Blackwood region range from traditional postal correspondence with campuses, to e-mail correspondence and use of university websites. On-line courses are available with universities from outside the region, and televised courses are offered by TAFE. The regionally based campus of Edith Cowan University, located in the city of Bunbury (between one and three hours' drive from the communities studied), does not currently offer on-line courses or region-specific outreach to the Warren-Blackwood (e.g., on-site courses in communities). This study was designed to assist the university to design an appropriate and sustainable outreach strategy which would respond to the needs of the region's students.

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[1] This study was carried out for Edith Cowan University's Learning and Future Technologies Unit between 15 September and 25 October 2000, by the author with assistance from researchers Viti Simmons and Bernard Humphries. It involved oral and written surveys of community members with experience in long-distance tertiary education, and of local high school and TAFE students.

The results of this study suggest low-cost ways to facilitate the learning experience of regional and rural students. The study also identifies some of the key limitations of distance-education technologies in responding to the on-the-ground needs of students. A key need identified by this study is for tertiary institutions to understand the culture of learning and provide access to basic support resources, regardless of the technological sophistication of course delivery.

The Warren-Blackwood Region: Geographic Considerations

The Warren-Blackwood Region of South Western Australia comprises the shires of Manjimup (towns of Manjimup, Northcliffe, Pemberton and Walpole), Nannup, Bridgetown-Greenbushes, and Boyup Brook, with a combined population of just over 17 500 people in an area of about 14 000 square kilometres.

This study region has been chosen due to its isolation from the South West's main regional centre (Bunbury), its relatively low socio-economic indicators and inland location, as well as the current interest in this area due to timber-industry restructuring. The region is known for its hardwood forests (karri, jarrah, and marri) and is also home to a plantation timber industry (pinus radiatus and other varieties). Primary industries underpin the Warren-Blackwood region, which is going through a period of considerable change as a result of the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). Timber mill closures are expected to continue, striking at the heart of the region's most stable traditional industry. New alternatives are being sought, and a skilled and educated population is key.

Improved training access has been identified as a regional-development priority by the *Warren Blackwood Regional Development Action Plan* (2000). Geographic isolation is a key constraint to obtaining training for the people in the region; the nearest university campus is located in Bunbury, over an hours' drive away (as much as three hours from some areas). Local TAFE offerings are available but limited by the difficulty in achieving minimum student numbers. Bus transport is available between Bunbury and some of the region's centres, but is often inadequate due to schedules and rural students' distance from town. Nor does Manjimup, the region's main town, offer a viable alternative, and the region's residents tend to look outside the Warren-Blackwood region for educational and commercial services.

Edith Cowan University students

Edith Cowan University (ECU) has four campuses: three in metropolitan Perth, and a regional campus based in Bunbury. In late 2000, there were 23 active ECU students from the Warren-Blackwood region. This compares with a total student body on the Bunbury regional campus of nearly 1 000. Very few people from the Warren-Blackwood region are accessing their region's nearest university campus.

Three-quarters of ECU students from the Warren-Blackwood region study on campus at the Bunbury campus (they are 'internal' commuting students). The remaining quarter study mixed-mode or externally. Despite the commuting distances involved, purely external study is not a popular option; however, one student recently shifted from internal to external study due to petrol prices.

Students interviewed[2] identified the main challenges to studying externally as:
self motivation;
not having anyone to discuss ideas with (isolation);
difficulties that arise when you are not on-line and lack computer access;
lack of lecturer contact;
having to read through all the material (rather than listening to lectures);
understanding the material;
obtaining research material for assignments; and
accessing text books

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[2] Fourteen (61%) were able to be contacted and agreed to an interview. More than half (eight) of students interviewed were studying internally, either full or part time. The remaining six were doing external or mixed mode study. Of the external or mixed-mode students, all had studied internally at some point, either at ECU or elsewhere.

Nearly all ECU students tend to be computer literate but only about half of ECU students have computer access from home. Computer facilities and Internet access are available in the smaller communities through telecentres (Manjimup, however, does not have a telecentre).

a. Student characteristics

Students from the region study in a broad range of the degree programs offered by ECU's Bunbury campus. There is a strong concentration of visual arts students in one town, Bridgetown, all eight of whom commute to Bunbury campus. The remainder of students are spread across a range of fields: Nursing, Social Science, Education, Business, Psychology, Generic Arts and Computer Science.

The majority of students from the region are mature-aged; among students interviewed, the average age was 31 years; two students were in their fifties, while four were aged 20 or under. More than half of the students are from Bridgetown (about one hour from Bunbury). None are from Walpole, Nannup or Northcliffe. Two students had moved out of the region and are living in or near Bunbury.

Less than half (43%) of current students from the region mentioned career or employment prospects as primary reasons they had chosen to study. Most (57%) chose to study because of specific interest in the field or a general interest in learning and furthering their education. There was no clear distinction in the choice of fields between those who had chosen to study mainly for employment prospects and those who chose to study from interest. One key reason why these students chose ECU was because of its location, being the closest university to their area.

Only two of the fourteen students interviewed had been working full time before commencing study at ECU; the remainder had been doing part-time or seasonal work or other studies. Eight currently work, most in part-time or seasonal/casual work. Most of the students were very clear about their goals and what they planned to do upon completion of their degree.

b. The study experience

Students from the region spend an average of twenty-seven hours per week studying, ranging from as little as ten to as much as fifty. One external student commented that she had fifteen hours a week to dedicate to study whether she did one unit or three; therefore she preferred to take one unit at a time and do well rather than poorly. Another student commented that "very little separates one's life" from her art course. Seventy-nine percent of students found the current time they were spending on their studies "acceptable" and "manageable".

Students identified their most important contact people for their studies as: (multiple answers)
lecturers (76%)
fellow students and study groups (57%)
tutors (21%)
student administration (14%)
librarian (7%)
academic skills adviser (7%) and
spouse (7%).

For external ECU students, course delivery basically consists of lecture materials and reading material received via post, as well as e-mail and telephone contact with staff. In addition, the ECU website is accessible via Internet. Of the six external students interviewed, three found the current course delivery style satisfactory. Others had suggestions for improvement which included: the need for more Web tutorials, the desire for space to be made available in home communities for interaction with other students, the need to be able to contact lecturers and receive library and research material on time, and the suggestion of a 1800 free call number to ease communication with the university's Bunbury and Perth campuses.

c. Non-continuing Students

The success of regional and rural students in completing their degree programs is a concern. While 23 ECU students from the Warren-Blackwood region were currently enrolled, 47 additional ECU students from this region had withdrawn, deferred or were currently not taking units in late 2000. Seventeen of these had withdrawn, 20 had deferred studies, and 10 were inactive (no current units). The fact that the region has over twice as many inactive students as active, may point to some of the difficulties of studying as a long-distance student.

In a third of cases, students identified 'distance', 'travel' and travel-related time constraints as key reasons why they discontinued their coursework.[3] Course content and delivery were other key factors. Over three quarters of sampled withdrawn students currently work, mostly full-time, which presents additional challenges for study. A third are seeking work, or additional work beyond what they currently have. Most were interested in resuming coursework at ECU. Their main obstacles to study would be travel, specifically the cost and availability of transport, as well as lack of time and the need for time management. Other obstacles to resuming study were the cost of university study in general, availability of childcare, family and work commitments, and access to a computer.

View from the high schools

The availability of training is a key regional development issue. Yet in many rural and regional areas, the problems involved with accessing training in region often begin, not at university level, but much earlier. In the Warren-Blackwood region, access difficulties begin at Year 11 for most students – and impact some students even earlier. Most towns in the Warren-Blackwood region have District High Schools which offer courses through Year 10; local student numbers are insufficient to offer Years 11 and 12 courses. The town of Walpole is an exception, where students can study locally only through Year 7.

The only public Senior High School in the Warren-Blackwood Region offering courses through Year 12 is Manjimup Senior High School. For other towns in the region, however, Manjimup represents a difficult commute. From Northcliffe, for instance, some students attend Manjimup High, but it is a two-hour round trip. Long hours are spent in the bus, and displacement comes from not being able to stay on in

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[3] A random sample of inactive students was surveyed via phone to identify factors involved in their decision to withdraw, defer, or not take courses this term. A 20% sample of eleven students was contacted (eliminating students who had moved away or were otherwise unable to be contacted). Nine of these students agreed to an interview.

Manjimup for sport or social interaction. There is a small private Catholic college, Kearnan College, which goes through Year 12, but it is located in Manjimup as well.

Thus, it became clear during the study that a great many Year 12 students no longer live in the region. Because Manjimup represents a long commute for much of the region, many students who wish to go on to Years 11 and 12 move outside the region to do so. They attend schools in Bunbury, Albany, Denmark, Narrogin, or Perth or elsewhere, often as boarders. The desire to be nearer to educational opportunities is a force pressuring whole families to move out of the region. "So much hinges on education," one resident commented. Another pointed out a common trend:

> *A lot of kids get to Year 10, and their family moves to Bunbury... it gives them those two years to settle into Bunbury, so then they can go to uni.... Most of (the people) are born and bred here, and it's really hard decision for them to make...but they realise, they've got to get the qualifications.*

At the time of the study, only about 150 Year 12 students were identified who lived and studied in the Warren-Blackwood region.

Improved access to university services may benefit students in the Warren-Blackwood region, yet by the time students reach university level, many have already moved away and are unlikely to return. Those students who remain in the region for Years 11 and 12 may benefit from enhanced university access – but not necessarily. Some are not university bound, and others are anxious to leave their 'boring' small towns and attend university at a large metropolitan campus. Even students who would prefer to stay in their home towns to study are often discouraged by the lack of facilities (e.g., labs) and limited range of courses at regional campuses. While nearly three-quarters (40) of the surveyed Manjimup Senior High School Year 12 students[4] are considering studying at university, nearly all planned to move away from home to do so.

Forty-three percent (17) of Manjimup High School students surveyed would, however, consider studying from home if it were feasible to do so, primarily because this would be less expensive and more convenient, with lower cost of living than in

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[4] Ninety-five surveys were hand-distributed to Year 12 students at Manjimup Senior High School, of which fifty-four (57%) were returned. Smaller numbers of students were also surveyed at Kearnan College (local private school) and Busselton Senior High School (where a few students from the region attend), where survey results were similar.

Perth. Yet there is still a concern as to what facilities would be offered, e.g., for nursing students. When training is not available, individuals who seek it are forced to leave. Thus, there is often a sizeable exodus of the community's youth. "Success in small communities represents going away," often to Perth, and the regions' resources flow into the city.

One student interviewed during a community visit in Manjimup shed light on the sorts of decisions high school students in the region face. 'John' would like to study history (which is not offered at the university campus in Bunbury), but he is putting his plans on hold. He was asked: If you live in Manjimup and you want to go to uni, what do you do? He replied: "You go to Perth!" The problem for John is: "I hate Perth" – he doesn't want to move there, so he is putting off his studies.

John doesn't drive, and in any case the university campus in Bunbury doesn't offer the degree course he wants. For him, studying via distance education would be difficult, primarily because of 'motivation'. Having university services available locally would be positive, but they would have to be in his chosen field, and the motivation issue would have to be addressed, before he would feel confident taking on studies in a less-traditional fashion.

John's concerns are typical of those of many high school students in the region who do not feel comfortable with – or financially able to – take on a move to the Perth metropolitan area, three to five hours away. This case underlines a key problem facing regional high school students: lack of access to relevant university level education in small regional towns can have a significant impact on students' expectations and career paths. One consultant who interviewed Year 12 students at the local private school, Kearnan College, noted:

> *What came across very clearly was the lack of tertiary education in Manjimup.... For those that weren't going on, it was mostly because they would have to leave home, and they weren't ready to do that.*

A twenty-year-old spokesperson for a group of young people that recently returned to the region from Perth, stated that when students from the region move on to the city, they miss their family support. The need to leave families and communities for educational opportunities is an issue for high school students in the region, and one which does not have easy solutions. Certainly, the availability of university-level education is only one ingredient in a more complex educational landscape.

View from the community

The pattern of youth exiting the region post-Year-10, and the numbers of current university and TAFE students over age twenty-five, suggest that demand for university-level courses in the region may be strongest amongst older students. Interviews in the communities bore out the impression that local professionals, women re-entering the work force, farmers and others seeking to expand their skills and employability were key groups potentially interested in tertiary study.

For educators, mature-age students present certain challenges. Some have been out of educational institutions for many years and must learn, or relearn, basic study skills and discipline. Some are very intelligent yet lack baseline academic skills; as one former TAFE teacher commented, the mature age students she worked with "lacked confidence… They were bright women…(who) had the ability to be at uni…. But the quality of their presentation was like lower primary-school level." At the same time, mature-age students bring life experiences and enthusiasm for study that younger students often lack.

Community visits in the region gave the opportunity to interview a few students who are pursuing university studies with universities other than ECU, either externally or on-line, or who had previously completed a university degree while living in the region. The experiences of these students and former students shed additional light on the dynamics of long-distance university study in the Warren-Blackwood region:

Nancy is a forty-three-year-old woman studying herbal medicine externally with a university in Queensland. As part of her course, she must commute occasionally to Perth for three days of lectures. The costs of travel, lodging and STD phone calls are obstacles, as well as the need to complete clinical hours as part of her degree requirements.

Andrea is a young student studying Criminal Sociology via distance education with a university in New South Wales. She started her degree in residence there, then continued externally when she moved. Corresponding with New South Wales has proven a challenge for this student: "They send the books to me, but it's a joke, because you can only keep them for two weeks, and mail to rural WA takes a week to arrive." She has to send assignments by regular mail, "so you have to send everything a week ahead" – particularly problematic when she is waiting for books to arrive.

Mary is a mature-aged woman taking an online course in computing via UWA – the actual course is from the United States. There are bulletin boards so there is interaction and feedback, also "you can work at your own pace." This student has found availability of online courses from Western Australian universities lacking. She contacted Curtin about a course in e-commerce, "but they said I couldn't do it externally. I thought that was really odd….because e-commerce is about using the Internet! They said to talk to some of the universities interstate if I wanted to do (the course) externally."

Thomas is a 37-year-old man who is studying metallurgy at Murdoch University externally, one unit at a time, while working full time as a mine plant superintendent. He began his degree part-time while living in Perth, and is now in his final year after ten years of study. He emphasises: "It takes a long time."

Janet did a B.Ed and two post-graduate education degrees externally with ECU. She began the B.Ed via an "off-campus course" with local lecturers in the 1970s; this course was cancelled midway through due to lack of funding. Janet prefers distance education, because it is not necessary to listen to lectures, and she can work at her own pace. She now holds a professional job in the education field and runs her own business.

Oscar is a mine worker who recently completed a degree in environmental management as an external Murdoch student while working full time. At one stage he had attempted to commute to Perth for lectures but found that "too difficult." His workplace supported him in his studies.

Leslie and ***Vicky*** both did their degrees as mothers of young children. Leslie moved to the region partway through her degree in primary teaching, and commuted to ECU Bunbury for the third year. She was not offered an external studies option and found commuting expensive and difficult, although she was able to schedule her full-time courses so she could make one trip to Bunbury per week. Vicky did external studies in history at Murdoch part time, doing one unit per term; her degree took her ten years to complete. She had previously lived in Perth and switched from internal to external study when she moved to the Warren-Blackwood region. Completing the degree opened up an opportunity for her as a TAFE lecturer.

Sue recently finished a business/accounting degree at ECU as an external student. She had begun her degree in 1990, later moved to Perth to study, and then moved to the Warren-Blackwood region; she attempted to commute but ended up doing her final year as an external student. She is now working in her small town as a Landcare coordinator.

Most of these students completed their degree via a mixture of internal and external study, often abandoning attempts to commute due to difficulty and costs. Challenges presented by moving house, raising children and the sheer time involved in completing a degree (ten years in some cases) are common features of these stories.

Key needs and potential solutions

Long-distance students in regional and rural areas face particular issues. The study identified the following key issues for university students in the Warren-Blackwood region:

- isolation and lack of peer interaction/ peer support;
- limited access to academic resources (particularly texts and research materials); and
- the need for "enormous levels of motivation".

Particularly, students who commute long-distance to campus face:

- expense (transportation, sometimes lodging, child care, and/or time off from work);
- transport difficulties; and
- time crunch as they try to juggle family, commuting time, study, and often work as well.

While students who study externally face:

- difficulty communicating with lecturers and tutors;
- a strong need for independent study skills;
- long time-lags between start of courses and completion; and
- sometimes, difficulty in completing degrees when degree programs are changed or courses are not offered externally.

Long-distance students frequently used "*interaction*" and "*contact*" to describe the on-campus experience and "*isolation*" to describe the off-campus experience. Students observed: "The disadvantages with external studies are that you miss out on the contact with other students." "Anyone that was studying externally, we found that we shared that common sense of isolation, and the stress that you go through when you've got assignments due and you try to juggle family, work, assignments.... By the time I'd finished, I'd become an independent studier." "Just the fact that you're studying can be quite isolating. Your friends are not studying, your partner isn't studying." Realities of travel and time constraints mean that many commuting students also face isolation, though to a lesser extent that their colleagues who study externally.

On-site degree courses in the region's small communities are generally not feasible due to low student numbers. Mixed distance and face-to-face learning in small communities, however, might offer an alternative to existing models of internal and external study. Designing such programs requires an in-depth understanding of what services regional and rural students need, and what obstacles they face. Comments made by a wide range of current and former long-distance students from the Warren-Blackwood region suggest that there are particular obstacles which, if overcome, could heighten the likelihood of student success, while making education more feasible and appealing for other students in the region. These are:

- access to other students: study groups, discussion groups, student-to-student socialising;
- access to lecturers, both face-to-face and via telephone;
- access to other people relevant to the learning process, such as a local mentor;
- "Involved", informed and proactive tutors;
- access to academic resources, particularly texts and books/articles for research projects;
- access to a quiet place to study, and/or child care;
- reduced need to travel;
- access to academic information – university courses, requirements, etc.;
- access to general academic support, to enhance time management ability, provide support and reduce isolation; and
- different ways of presenting material and assessing it, appropriate to long-distance students.

The heart of successful service lies less in *technology* than in *methodology* – understanding the culture of learning, and responding in creative ways. Technology alone is not enough – students who had experienced courses via videoconference characterised them as "dreadful" or "ineffective", for the instructors were basically talking heads. Yet paper correspondence, still the most prevalent technology of university distance education in the region, can be both dry and isolating. One local professional commented: "I did two postgraduate qualifications via corresponence – it was awful.... There's no substitution for having face-to-face contact with someone to whom you can relate, personally and professionally."

That "face-to-face" contact is a key aspect of the culture of learning, as expressed by current and former students in the Warren-Blackwood region. The contact need not be with lecturers – other students can play this role, even students from somewhat different fields. The key need is to talk *ideas* – concepts for papers, group discussion, etc. – and *experiences* – what it feels like to be a student, sharing stresses and enthusiasms. A list of names of other students in the same field, as the university currently provides, is useful but not enough. A chance to actually meet other students – whether during a beginning-of-term orientation, monthly gatherings, or in an informal meeting area for local students – would reduce the stresses associated with distance study. Once face-to-face contact has been established, ongoing contact via e-mail, telephone and in-person meetings would be more likely.

The lecturer is a key ingredient in the learning culture of students interviewed, though much of the role he or she plays can also be taken by an effective tutor who knows the subject area well. When material is unclear and when students don't understand a point, being unable to contact a knowledgeable person and receive an effective explanation, in a timely manner, is vital to the learning process. The question of whether lecturers need to actually present the course material depends on the subject (for art, it is vital; for history, it is not) as well as the particular learning style of the student (some students prefer to read, other students prefer to watch a lecture).

In general, videos of lectures appeal, but would need to be used when the visual aspect of the lecture is engaging – not just a talking head. Similar considerations would apply for videoconferencing – including a lecturer who knows how to deliver to a camera. Direct visits to communities from lecturers are neither economical or necessary in most cases – though local mentors would be useful in providing subject-specific assistance and someone face to face "with whom you can relate." Such mentors could potentially be recruited onto a local consultant database and compensated on an as-needed basis. Finally, local academic advisers or periodic visits from tutors could play a key motivational and facilitating role.

Tailoring courses to the needs of regional and rural students is no small challenge – it requires an in-depth assessment of curriculum and delivery mechanisms in the light of local resources, obstacles and the kinds of learning-culture issues mentioned above. At the same time, the variety of student needs must be met: computer-literate, motivated students offer certain options for effective course delivery, while underprepared but motivated students may need bridging courses to build confidence and boost computer literacy, research and writing skills to appropriate levels. Existing resources offered by local libraries and telecentres can be built upon and obstacles alleviated. In the end, creativity and flexibility in course design and delivery will be key to responding to the needs of isolated regional students in effective yet low-cost ways. The challenges and the opportunities are enormous.

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Vocational education: Voices from the field

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Abstract

One of the significant changes that resulted from the review of secondary education in New South Wales or the McGaw Report (1997), was the introduction of Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses into senior school curriculum. The implementation of these VET courses commenced in 2000. This paper will focus on the responses or voices from the field in two rural schools to these VET courses during the first year of implementation. Responses and reactions from students studying specific VET courses and VET teachers will be compared to responses from non-VET teachers and parents of VET students.

Introduction

Although Vocational Education and Training (VET) has always had a place in secondary schools, since 2000 there has been an increasing emphasis and prominence given to VET in schools with the inclusion of seven Framèwork courses in Years 11 and 12. These contribute to a student's Higher School Certificate (HSC) result. Students may also elect to have one of these courses counted in their University Admissions Index (UAI) score, meaning the potential student clientele is wider than ever before. The NSW Director General of Education sees broad implications in these shifts, stating that the move to standards referenced assessment will eliminate "the out-dated and absurd distinction between academic and vocational courses in our schools" (Boston, 2001, p. 7). This paper focuses on the perceptions and responses of rural participants during the first year of implementation of VET framework courses in New South Wales schools.

While earlier VET courses continue, including the Joint Secondary Schools TAFE (JSST) courses and school developed 'Board Endorsed' courses, there has been a significant and surprising shift towards take up of the Frameworks Courses. Unlike JSST and earlier VET courses, these form part of the HSC. In 1995 the beginnings of this shift are to be found in the review of the NSW HSC headed by Barry McGaw, with the aim being a fairer, less complex and more rigorous qualification. This resulted in a strongly supported white paper, *Securing their future: The New South Wales Government's reforms for the Higher School Certificate* (1997). Nationally, the take up rate of VET in schools courses in senior schooling far surpassed predictions. Table 1 (MCEETYA, 2000) reflects this.

Table 1: Actual & projected growth of participation in VET in schools

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
	Actuals				**Projections**				
Yr 11-12 Projected Enrolments for Australia- [DETYA Statistics]	371,333	389,155	393,846	403,323	406,850	408,954	409,443	408,333	409,614
VET in Schools Enrol-ments	60,000	92,000	117,000	136,710	166,700	196,700	226,700	256,700	286,700
% Yr 11-12 Enrolments	16%	24%	30%	34%	41%	48%	55%	63%	70%

The range of vocational education courses available in NSW schools introduced under the new HSC VET Course Frameworks include:

- Business Services (Administration);
- Information Technology;
- Hospitality and Tourism;
- Construction;
- Metals and Engineering;
- Primary Industries; and
- Retail.

The research focus

The focus of this exploratory study was to seek the views and perceptions of those groups of people involved in vocational education programs in Year 11. The guiding research aims are:

- to note and document a range of perspectives and experiences held by those groups on the experience of being involved in VET in schools; and
- to identify the range of issues emerging from each group.

For this study, two provincial rural high schools were selected in consultation with the District Superintendent of schools and the Vocational Education consultant in a rural region of New South Wales. School A was a large high school with an enrolment of 900 students located in a provincial rural city, while school B was a small high school with a student population of 320 located in a rural town.

The research subjects

In the process of identifying whom the research subjects would be, the authors recognised two levels of involvement. Firstly, there was the 'stakeholder' group, which included those people who were directly involved in the implementation of the VET framework courses. Members of this group were the VET teachers, the VET coordinators, employers of VET students and students enrolled in one or more VET framework courses. Secondly, there was the 'participant' group in the study who were indirectly associated with or affected by the implementation of the VET courses. Members of this second group were the parents of the students, the non-VET teachers at each school, and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

This identification process revealed the six key groups included in the study. A total of 53 people contributed to the study.

These groups were:

- the students – those students enrolled in Year 11 who were studying at least one VET course;
- teachers of vocational education courses – the teachers in each school who were directly involved in the delivery on the specific VET course;
- non-VET teachers – those teachers at each school who did not teach vocational education courses;
- parents – those parents of the Year 11 students studying a vocational education course;

- employers – the industry / employer representatives from the local area that had participated in the work placement component of the VET courses;
- VET coordinators – the within school vocational education coordinators; and
- aboriginal education consultative representatives.

The numbers in each group that participated in the study are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Focus groups

Subjects				
Stakeholders	***School A***	***School B***	***Others***	***Total***
Students	**6**	**6**		**12**
VET Teachers	**5**	**5**		**10**
VET Coordinators	**1**	**1**		**2**
Employers	**4**	**3**		**7**
Participants				
Parents	**6**	**2**		**8**
Non-VET Teachers	**5**	**5**		**9**
Aboriginal Consultative Group			**5**	**5**
Total				**53**

Methodology

Each group of subjects was interviewed by the researchers using focus groups. A focus group consisted of between 4 and 8 members, each of whom volunteered to be part of the study. Each interview ranged from 30 minutes to 60 minutes and was audio-taped. The taped interviewed was analysed by the researchers and emergent issues were identified. All data were collected during the early part of Term 4 in New South Wales. The interviews were conducted on site, and subjects were helpful and informative in their own context.

Selected findings

In this paper, the responses of the students, the VET teachers, the non-VET teachers, the VET coordinators, the parents, and the employers will be analysed and their perception of the initial implementation of the VET Framework Course will be discussed.

VET teachers

Who teaches VET?

The group ranged in teaching experience from relatively new to teaching (3 years) through to very experience teachers with 25 years in schools. All teachers commented that they had chosen to seek certification to teach the vocational education courses as a result of training that was offered. The courses taught by these VET teachers included Information Technology, Retail, Primary Industries, Hospitality, Business Services (Administration), Hospitality and Tourism, Construction, Metals and Engineering and Primary Industries. School B also offered a course called Work Studies, which is a generic course which allows further opportunities for extra or extended work placement opportunities, but which does not contribute to the UAI. All teachers also had a substantial non-vocational education teaching load (at least 75%) in other curriculum areas.

Views on the VET curriculum

The teachers made the comment that following some initial problems about content and competency standards in their vocational education course the implementation of the new framework course was progressing smoothly. A number of teachers believed the new vocational education courses were an exciting and challenging innovation in senior schooling and that they were pleased to be part of this innovation in curriculum. Comments included:

> *'fantastic';* (Teacher, School A)
>
> *'the more subjects come on board the more choices the kids have got'* (Teacher, School B)

Meeting the NSW Board of Studies' content and competency requirements for their VET course was not perceived to be a problem. The teachers found using the competency based assessment practices were appropriate and were generally well received by the students as being relevant to their work practices. Teachers did comment that there seemed to be many extra layers of requirements for vocational education teacher certification. In particular, at School A, the process of gaining Registered Training Organisation (RTO) status for the school had been a stressful experience.

> *'The demands from outside agencies, TAFE and VETAB, are almost depressing to say the least.'*(Head Teacher)

Finally teachers stated that the 'mix' of academic and vocational education courses was still evolving and that students did need more advice about Year 11/ 12 curriculum choice and their future career pathways. All teachers commented on the wide ability range in their students who were studying a VET course. For some students they were studying the course as an essential part of their chosen career path through to other students who had 'no idea' of a career after completing Year 12.

How is VET being implemented?

The implementation of the VET courses in 2000 was regarded as a benefit for all students as these courses increased the curriculum choice available to Year 11 students. The teachers believed that the VET courses needed to be time-tabled into the school day to ensure parity with other non-VET (academic) courses offered at the schools. At School B, the timetable was organised so that the VET work placement occurred as a block of time for the whole of Thursday each week.

Work placement

One of the key elements of the vocational education courses is the structured work placement experience. Ainley and Fleming (1997), Cummings and Carbines (1997) and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1997) suggest that the key elements of successful work placements include:

- strong coordination of the program;
- linked directly to the school based curriculum;
- the personal connection made by student to their school and work experiences; and
- the valuable learning experiences that are derived from the work placement.

When the students were on work placement, all teachers were concerned that the students would be missing other course content material. The teachers encouraged their students to seek assistance from these other teachers to 'catch up' the missed content. At school A, the students were required to sign a form which stated that they would make up the missed content and missed assessment tasks in their other Year 11 courses. On the content within the VET courses, all teachers stated that these courses were well received by the students.

At school A, all work placements were arranged and managed by an outside agency while at School B, almost all work placements occurred within the small rural town community and were arranged and managed by an in-school coordinator.

Certificate 4 qualification

The requirement for all VET teachers to undertake the Certificate 4 qualification as a mandatory pre-requisite to being able to teach a VET course was seen as problematic by the teachers. They raised a number of issues and concerns about this qualification. One concern focused on this qualification being regarded as an alternate or 'back door' teaching qualification. The teachers were concerned that this was a way to bypass the normal 3 or 4 year pre-service teacher education course. Also, the teachers expressed the view that they had already trained as professional educators and course assessors, the VET Certificate 4 course was asking them to do the same things as they had completed successfully in their teacher education course a second time.

In summation

The VET teachers were:

1. highly committed to successfully implementing the frameworks courses in their schools;
2. confident that they would achieve the competencies described in the VET courses;
3. aware of the benefits for students in selecting a mix of VET and non-Vet courses in their Year 11/12 course of studies;
4. pleased with the way their students had responded positively to their VET course and the mandatory work place experiences;
5. concerned that the structured work placements could adversely affect their student performance in non-VET courses, and
6. concerned about the levels of external certification required before they were able to teach the VET course.

The Non-VET Teachers

Who were these VET teachers?

A total of 9 teachers representing six Key Learning Areas were interviewed. They ranged from classroom teachers through to head teachers with a wide range of teaching experience (4 to 26 years).

Is there a relationship between their teaching specialisations and the new VET courses?

Some teachers were ignorant of the operation of VET courses at their school, eg. “I have no idea what VET means.’ Other teachers perceived there were little overlap between the related VET course and their teaching area (e.g., Primary Industries and Agriculture). Some teachers believed there were some areas of overlap in content, especially in the senior courses e.g., formal language skills and the English courses. One teacher made the comment that the VET courses were perceived to have a much higher relevance to the real world than their own teaching specialisation, which this teacher saw as a distinct advantage for the VET courses. Some of the teachers taught Year 11 classes where they had no VET students while other teacher had some VET students in their ‘mixed’ class. Overall, the non-VET teachers had a limited understanding on the content and the potential linkages between the VET courses and their own teaching specialisations.

Benefits for the school in offering VET courses

All teachers believed the offering of VET courses was in the best interests of their students as it gave them a greater curriculum choice in Year 11. ‘There are so many kids staying on to later years, I think that’s the obvious answer, us being able to cater for a much wider range of kids and abilities and interests.’ Some teachers also acknowledged a more personal teaching benefit as a result of the implementation of the VET courses at the school. These teachers stated that, in the past, there were always students enrolled in their courses who did not want to be there but had chosen their class as it was the ‘best’ option. Now they had fewer students in their class and those who were there were keen to study their course.

The practical aspects of the VET courses were perceived by these teachers to be the significant reasons for students not selecting their teaching course. Also, many teachers expressed the view that the practical nature of the VET courses and the work placements had positive effects on students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Finally, a number of the teachers were aware of the positive effects on strengthening the relationship between the school and the local community through having the VET students undertake their work placements in the local community. One teacher commented that through the work placement program, the local employers now had a much more positive view of the young people, as they were now known to the employers.

Perceived problems with VET courses

The non-VET teachers identified two problem areas that directly impacted upon their teaching.

First, a concern that students enrolled in VET courses miss classes due to the work placement program. This meant these students were often behind in their study and assessment requirements in these non-VET courses. Further, these VET students were required to catch up their missed work as evidenced by the written undertaking signed by the VET students. Some teachers at School A believed the VET students did not catch up the missed work, 'They say they catch up, but I think practically speaking, they don't.'

Second, the way the school's timetable was constructed to cater for the work placement component of the VET courses was identified as a concern. At school B, the teachers stated that there was limited class attendance on Thursdays when work placements were occurring.

In summation

Non-VET teachers

1. held low levels of understanding about the organisation of 'content' within a VET course;

2. had not explored how the links between a VET course and their teaching specialisation could be exploited;
3. believed that the practical components of the VET courses were a considerable advantage compared to academic school courses;
4. felt that school-community partnerships were strengthened through the VET courses; and
5. expressed concerns about the impact of work placements on the students continuity of conceptual development in their academic courses.

The students

Why choose a VET course?

The students were very impressive with a clear grasp of the benefits and potential difficulties in selecting VET courses as part of their senior studies. At School A, students only chose one VET course, which was partly a result of the way the time table lines for subject selection were arranged. In School B, on the other hand, four out of the six students interviewed had selected two VET courses, with two students selecting Work Studies as their second option. Students from each of the Frameworks courses were represented with the exception of Business Services (Administration), which is being introduced into School B in 2001. Students from both schools mentioned the fact that sometimes the VET courses were seen by students as the first ones to be discarded if one course was being dropped in Year 12. In fact, particularly in School A, students reported all VET classes had diminished in numbers both from students not continuing in this course or at school. Students selected these courses for a variety of reasons:

> *'I saw it counted towards the UAI and I enjoy it, so that's the reason I chose it.'*
>
> *'I chose it as a back up plan 'cos I want to get into nursing but if I don't make it, I want to go into hospitality.'*
>
> *'Experience and meet a few new employers. See if I can get a job out of it '*

What do the students think about VET courses?

Students from both schools commented on the difference they had noticed in the VET courses compared with their other courses. All expressed enjoyment in the more practically orientated skills in the VET courses, and seemed to derive a sense of satisfaction from achieving competencies and being able to demonstrate success. There were favourable comments about these courses being "hands on ' and "it's better because we get to do stuff'. At School A, in particular, students commented on the different relationship between students and teachers in VET courses. "Teacher's not always over your shoulder looking at you. You've got work to do and you do it.' Comments about responsibility and taking control of their own learning followed this comment, and students were impressive in their identification of self-direction and responsibility in these courses.

How do students respond to the structured work placements?

As the two schools operate on very different systems, the comments reflected this difference. At School A, students have a week of block release per year for work placement. In School B there is one day per week dedicated to VET work placements. The discrepancy in hours dedicated to structured work placement reflects the choices a school can make to meet the requirements for the award of a Certificate 1, 2, or 3 qualification. This diversity of work placement arrangements is reflected in VET courses across Australian secondary schools (Malley, Robinson, Keating & Hawke, forthcoming; Smith & Green, forthcoming).

Most students enjoyed their work placement, although there was more enthusiasm exhibited by students from School B as the longer term and wider opportunities meant they felt more comfortable and confident in their workplaces. A student at School B said: 'You'll learn a lot more on the job than what you do here at school because there's more equipment on the job. There's a lot more you can do on the job because they're actually working on projects. In school, you can't work on a project that much....They show you how to do it and then they just let you do it and learn to do it....so that way it's a lot easier on you'. At School A, a few students had poor experiences at workplaces, as they were confined to menial jobs and not allowed to expand their knowledge. 'I'd need to get a bit more of the hands on experience with serving and cooking and that, and all I done was wash dishes and what dirty jobs there were, I had to do'. This student will get a different placement next time, and all students reported there was a process where you could select the same or different workplaces in subsequent stages of the course. Several students reported they had found part time or casual work through their placements, and one believed he would be offered a full time apprenticeship in the metal industry as a result of a very successful work experience. All students also mentioned the disadvantage of having to catch up for time and work missed through work placement, but most felt this was possible and that teachers and the system devised assisted them to do this in most cases. This was slightly at variance to the comments made by teachers.

In summation

1. Most students interviewed were very clear about their reasons for selecting VET courses.
2. These reasons were often, although not exclusively, very closely aligned to future career options.
3. Students seemed less clear about the linking of these courses and the UAI, although most students interviewed were not interested in University studies, with the exception of one person at School A. This student had specific goals in engineering he believed would be assisted by a VET qualification as well as a good UAI score.
4. Students identified differences in course matter, identifying it as more practical and related to real life skills.
5. Students also referred to a very different relationship with VET teachers, with the student teacher relationship being more like practices using adult learning principles.
6. More responsibility was perceived in self directed and motivated learning in VET courses.

The VET coordinators

Two models of coordination

The two VET coordinators interviewed saw their roles and responsibilities in very different ways as the arrangements varied in the two schools. In School A, all work placement arrangements are brokered through an outside agency. This means the VET coordinator role has a more 'in house' focus. The VET coordinator is also the deputy principal. He explained the role would normally be taken by the 'Leading Teacher' (sic) but they had shifted roles to fit the predilections of the individuals. He has basically been involved in the introduction and implementation of VET in this school. The initial focus was JSST courses and the main job of the VET Coordinator was coordinating arrangements between the TAFE and the school. 'In the eighteen months that I have been doing the job it has certainly changed a lot' with the introduction of the Framework courses. School A is involved in a collegiate model with six local secondary schools. During 2000, School A went through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) inspection, a major process for the staff. 'It's been a huge learning experience both for myself and also for anyone involved in the school in VET'.

In School B, the VET coordinator had a long history on VET in schools coordination, as she had been involved since the inception of the TRAC program. She was very proactive in seeking, monitoring and tracking funding, mainly from ASTF, for her position and role. She was also very involved with the organisation of work placements for each VET student, consulting with students, employers, community members and the Careers adviser. As she is situated at the school as both a teacher and VET coordinator, she is a direct link between the school, the employers and the community. The School B coordinator was very enthusiastic and passionately committed to VET in schools. She told the interviewers:

> *'Once students got into this program, they discovered it was a positive aspect of school whereas for some of them school had been a negative experience before.'*

Many years after completing the program, former students have often returned and commented on the fact that this program got them started, motivated and assisted them in their career success. The comments of the School B coordinator tended to focus on both the whole student and the outcomes for that student beyond school. The emphasis on outcomes and achievements for the School A coordinator was on dealing with inschool behaviours and performance. He commented several times on visiting VET classes, compared with the School B coordinator, who commented on student pathways and employers comments, visits to the workplace and beyond school outcomes. School A was also committed to VET programs and saw the benefits in terms of learning and attitude, particularly for students at risk or of lower ability.

> *'... it's really rewarding to see that that sort of passion for learning is happening in this school'.*

What are some of the perceived problems with VET in schools?

With larger numbers and a more urban situation, School A expressed concerns over duty of care and monitoring student movements. The coordinator stated:

> *'The biggest problem we are facing with kids going here there and everywhere that it is someone else's responsibility for attendance issues and all that sort of stuff.'*

Both coordinators were concerned about continuity of funding. For School A, the removal of external coordination to set up work placements would make VET programs virtually impossible in the opinion of the coordinator. Funding was also seen as a crucial issue, in fact her position depended on continued funding, for the School B coordinator.

> *'We have to re-finance every year and every year we put a contingency plan in place in case we don't get funding to do it. '*

She also felt that one aspect which was difficult was the 'amazing amount' of paperwork.

> *'From a practical viewpoint, there is no physical or funding support anywhere for all that admin. The school this year has been exceptionally supportive and has managed to fund me for one day a week admin, and I would not have survived without having it.'*

The School A coordinator also found the competencies problematic.

> *'I think probably the biggest problem is that the competencies. The idea behind the competencies is that someone in West Australia can be doing the course and someone in NSW will be doing it and they will be exactly the same. The reality is that most of the competencies are so general you can make them anything you like, and the teachers in out school have found that as well.'*

The School A coordinator was not a VET teacher, whereas the School B coordinator had taught predominantly VET courses.

There were also differences in the perception of whose role it was to teach these courses. School A had a history of differences of approach with TAFE. Although some improvement was recognised, 'Slowly, TAFE is coming to the realisation that they really need to work with us', but there was on ongoing lack of trust and understanding. 'There is definitely a feeling among some TAFE teachers that teachers aren't qualified enough to do these courses'. The School A coordinator was also concerned about the viability of other vocational learning opportunities because of the amount or time, effort and resources consumed by the senior VET program.

> *'The down side might be that this may spell the end of Year 10 Work Experience.'*

What are some successes?

The School B coordinator believed that some of the success of the VET program may be attributable to the individual attention and training students receive particularly with some employers who she knows did not enjoy school themselves who were 'exceptional with the poorer student'. Both expressed some concern over the lack of support for most VET teachers to be able to visit their students at the workplace. The coordinator of School B believed she is almost a 'luxury' in this system by being a school based person who also has the role of visiting workplaces.

> *'In my case, I'm also employed to teach, so that's where my structures come in, but on a management level, you are actually managing an amazing amount of resources, both human and physical. We do an amazing amount of one on one...so again that is a luxury, but I feel the outcomes for our students have been exceptional and a worthwhile investment.'*

Once again, the emphasis in terms of success was on the in school experiences for the School A coordinator. 'When I go around and see what these kids are doing, I'm amazed at the quality of the work they do'.

In summation

1. Both coordinators saw practical and educational value in VET in schools programs.

2. For School A, where the coordinator played a major management role as well as coordinating VET programs, the value was situated with the students while on site at school with improved learning achievements and behaviour.
3. For School B, the enthusiasm of the coordinator rested on the beyond school outcomes for students, and the changes evidenced in the 'whole student' in terms of career pathways and opportunities.
4. The School B coordinator, who was involved in direct contact with employers, arranging placements and visits in workplaces, there was an emphasis on partnerships between the school and employers and the school and the community.
5. The School A coordinator saw the VET courses as a way of offering courses and opportunities to students of lesser ability and motivation to reinvigorate their learning and improve their self esteem.
6. While the School B coordinator would agree with these views, she expressed the view that all students, including those from the top academic stream, would greatly benefit from the opportunity to experience structured work placements as part of their school course.

The parents

Overall, the two groups of parents interviewed in the study held remarkably similar views about the VET course and their student's participation in the specific VET frameworks course. One general finding that emerged from both sets of interviews was the parents had a very general understanding about the school based and workplace based components in the VET course. Yet, they also expressed a lack of specific understanding about the content studied in the VET course and its contribution to the Higher School Certificate award at the end of Year 12.

Why did your child choose the VET course?

During our discussion with the parents about why their child had selected a VET course, parents' responses reflected a consistent view that their child had selected the course with little input from them. Some parents perceived the VET course as a transition link between the world of school and the work. Comments such as 'they get a fairly broad spectrum idea of what the job involves' (female parent), and 'help gain a job'; (male parent) supported this view.

What value was the VET course to their child?

Parents were able to identify two major outcomes from their child participating in the VET courses. Firstly, their child had developed a range of work-related skills and experiences through the VET courses that would be an asset when seeking employment after Year 12. Secondly, some parents believed that the VET course was beneficial in assisting their child to more clearly and realistically consider the options for their post school career path. As one parent commented: 'There are avenues that are open that we never see.'

Did the VET course influence the decision to stay on at school?

The response by all parents to this question was surprising. All parents commented that their child would have continued on into Year 11 and 12 irrespective of whether a VET course was available or not. However, some parents then qualified this comment by stating that the VET course had assisted their child in deciding what other HSC courses they should study.

Other comments from the parents

The final part of the interviews elicited additional comments from parents about the VET courses. Two areas were reported. First, the impact of the structured work placement on their child's other academic courses was identified. In particular, parents were concerned that their child was missing lessons in non-VET courses while completing their work placement. *'they're missing lessons in ...., I'm very concerned about that.'* Second, parents praised the way in which employers and the VET teachers treated the students as adults in both the workplace and as learners. This change reflects one of the key differences between the VET courses and the other non-VET courses studied at school and was emerged as an important difference in the interviews with the students at each school.

In summation

Parents believed that:

1. their child had chosen to participate in the VET course on their own volition;
2. the VET courses offered a range of experiences and skills that were valued by employers, VET teachers and their students;

3. the VET courses provided an avenue for their child to make more informed career path decisions; and
4. the tension between work placement requirements, the school's timetable and other non-VET course requirements still needed to be resolved.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, the actual and projected participation rates in VET courses in schools were reported. The significant trend from these quantitative data is the increasing proportion of students who will select a VET course. Our exploratory research project provides some qualitative insights into and explanations for the reasons why student are selecting these VET courses. Our research clearly indicates that the practical focus, the work placements and the relevance to post school career opportunities are key reasons for student participation. These findings are echoed in the comments of the VET teachers, VET coordinators and, to a lesser degree, the parents of the students. Finally, both VET teachers and non-VET teachers are concerned that the students adopt a balanced approach to meeting the course requirements of their VET and non-VET senior courses of study.

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A foot in both camps: School students and workplaces

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Abstract

It is now uncommon for young people to leave school without having had experience in workplaces. Sometimes such experience is arranged by schools - through work experience, structured work placements or other programs. Increasingly young people are also getting workplace experience as part-time student workers. This experience may be quite extensive. A research project funded by the National Research and Evaluation Committee has been examining the different types of learning experienced by students in the different modes of experiencing the workplace. The project also examined the question of whether certain students find access to such experiences more difficult than others do.

These question are of vital importance because workplace experience assists young people in their transition from school to full-time work; and also because the foundations for lifelong learning through work may be set down in early workplace experiences. It is therefore essential to have some understanding of the nature, extent and methods of workplace learning for school students. This paper presents the findings related to the extent and nature of school students' learning in the workplace, a significant proportion of the project.

Introduction

An important development in the post-compulsory education system has been an increased involvement of secondary school students in learning in workplaces both in work experience and vocational placements in VET in Schools programs. In addition, an increasing number of school students are now in formal paid employment, including around 4000 in employment as part-time apprentices and trainees (MCEETYA, 2000). These changes encourage debates including: the suitability of school students having paid work; the desirability of recognition for the skills gained in paid work; inequities of access to all types of workplace experiences, and whether work experience and placements encourage an uncritical acceptance of workplace values which need to be challenged. However there has been little explicit examination of what students learn in workplaces and how they learn it. This paper gives some of the results of an NREC-funded project which examines the extent and nature of learning which students in years 10, 11 and 12 gain from their experiences in workplaces (Smith & Green, forthcoming). Relevant literature will be examined briefly as well as key findings from a survey which was carried out among students from Years 10, 11 and 12 in thirteen schools and the results of follow up focus groups and interviews with students, teachers and employers in NSW and South Australia.

Literature review

a. Part-time work

The proportion of school students who work part-time is generally agreed to be increasing, although the extent of student working is unclear. Somewhere between 30 and 50% of Australian school children of working age are generally believed to have formal part-time work (ABS, 1997[1]; Robinson, 1999, Wooden, 1998; Yap, 1998;). Much of the literature on student-working (especially the American literature) revolves around whether it is a 'good thing' (Hotchkiss, 1986; Hull, 1999) or a 'bad thing' (Greenberger, 1988). Robinson (1999) and others stress the link between student working and subsequent success in finding full-time work, although it is not clear that one causes the other. A small number of writers have been concerned about equity of access to part-time work (Griffin, 1985; Yap, 1998).

There has been little research on training and learning among student workers. It is usually agreed that student working encourages the development of general, transferable skills (Hull, 1999). However there has been little attention paid to how these, or other, skills are actually learned.

b. Work experience and vocational placements

It is often difficult to untangle work experience from structured work placements in the literature, with the terms having different meanings in different educational systems. Work experience is generally used to refer to the typical 'finding out about work' week undertaken by Australian students in years 10 or 11 (Smith & Harris, forthcoming). During the late 1980s and early 1990s when training reform meant that skills development rather than work familiarisation became more favourably regarded (Sweet, 1995) work experience became the Cinderella of student workplace experiences. Vocational placements are increasingly common now that the vast majority of Australian schools offer VET in schools programs. In 2000, 90% of

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[1] ABS, The Labour Force, 6203.0

Australian schools offered such programs, involving over 130,000 students (MCEETYA, 2000). However not all VET programs require placements (MCEETYA, 2000).

The major themes in the literature appear to be:

- 'enthusiastic' literature extolling the virtues of work placements (e.g., Frost, 2000);
- concern with role of employers and availability of placements (e.g., Figgis, 1998a; Miles Morgan Australia, 1998; Misko, 1998; Smith & Smith, 1996);
- resourcing issues including staff development of school teachers (eg Keating & Zbar, 1994; Ryan, 1997; Sweet, 1995);
- a large amount of literature on 'how to' administer programs (e.g., Misko, 2000);
- critical literature (e.g., Shilling, 1989; Wellington, 1992; Petherbridge, 1997); and
- scoping literature (e.g., Ainley & Fleming, 1995 & 1997; Malley, Robinson, Keating, Hawke, forthcoming).

There is relatively little literature on the learning outcomes of either work experience or work placements. Athanasou (1996, p. 8) points out that 'school-industry programs' may have 'positive experiential by-products', as often cited in the 'enthusiastic' literature, but that more work needs to be put into determining the *intended* consequences of such programs. Three studies which did investigate learning are those by Figgis (1998b) in Australia, Stasz & Kaganoff (1997) in the US and Petherbridge (1997) in the UK.

c. Outstanding issues from the literature

The literature review revealed the following major points which raised implications for the current study.

There is little literature about student-workers in Australia, and the data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) are dated (1992). A scoping study to establish the current extent and nature of part-time work for school students is needed.

There is a large body of literature, both Australian and overseas, on work experience and work placements, but much of it falls either into the 'scoping' category or the 'enthusiastic' category. There has been relatively little empirical investigation of what school students actually learn in workplaces.

There is some concern over equity of access to part-time work and to work experience and placements, but there is little empirical research in this area.

Several writers allude to *the superiority of placements compared with traditional work experience,* but more exploration of the differences is needed.

There is still some confusion over the outcomes intended from both work experience and structured work placements.

There is growing interest in capturing the learning from part-time working, although evidence suggests that policy-makers are more interested in this than students. (Billett, 1998; MCEETYA, 2000)

Interviews with key stakeholders

At the start of the research process, interviews were held with policy makers, employers and researchers in the area. These interviews confirmed many of the findings from the literature review. Many key stakeholders were struggling with implementation issues such as funding, staffing, availability of both work experience and vocational placements and equity issues. Learning, when discussed, was seen as very different from school-based learning. Stakeholders believed VET programs may offer students the opportunity to excel with alternative curriculum and different experiences. Various factors have caused both State and Commonwealth to increase the offering of VET subjects in senior school and include these subjects in senior certificates.

Survey method

The project steering committee, stakeholders and officials from DET (NSW) and DETE (SA) assisted in selecting the schools for administration of the survey. The sample of 13 schools represented public and private schools, rural and urban locations, and students from a range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. At the selected schools, all students in Years 10, 11 and 12 were invited to complete the questionnaire yielding 1,451 useable responses. The response rate was much higher in non-government schools than in government schools, despite having selected more of the latter. The results report on about half from each sector. The survey was administered in the second semester, when many students in Year 12 were unfortunately not available because of HSC (NSW) and SACE (SA) studies.

The survey instrument contained five parts: personal information; overview of the student's experiences in workplaces; detailed questions about work experience; detailed questions about one paid job; detailed questions about one structured work placement and learning and training questions. Students were asked to compare the different types of experiences, and this was investigated further in the case studies.

Case study method

After the survey, nine case studies were undertaken to provide qualitative data. Five were held in schools in NSW and SA. In each school, one focus group consisted of 8 – 10 students who had participated in at least two workplace activities out of the three: work experience, vocational placements and paid work. A second group in each school was made up of VET teachers, careers adviser and the Principal or their nominated representative. Case studies were all in public schools to increase the representation of public schools in the project. Because it was difficult to access Year 12 students during the course of the case studies, as they were carried out in the second half of the academic year, a special focus group of year 12 students was also convened. Four groups of employers were also interviewed. A particular effort was made to incorporate discussion of vocational placements in this qualitative phase of the research since the survey had produced only a limited response from students undertaking placements.

Findings from the project

This paper focuses on the project's first two research questions.

1. **'What is the extent and nature of the way in which Years 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?'**
2. **What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?**

The extent and nature of the way in which Years 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace

The paper can only present a selection from the huge amount of data gathered in the survey. As the process has revealed a dearth of information on learning from work for school students, this takes priority. Qualitative data from the focus group interviews are included. The mode of experiencing the workplace by school students in Years 10 – 12 is shown in Figure 1.

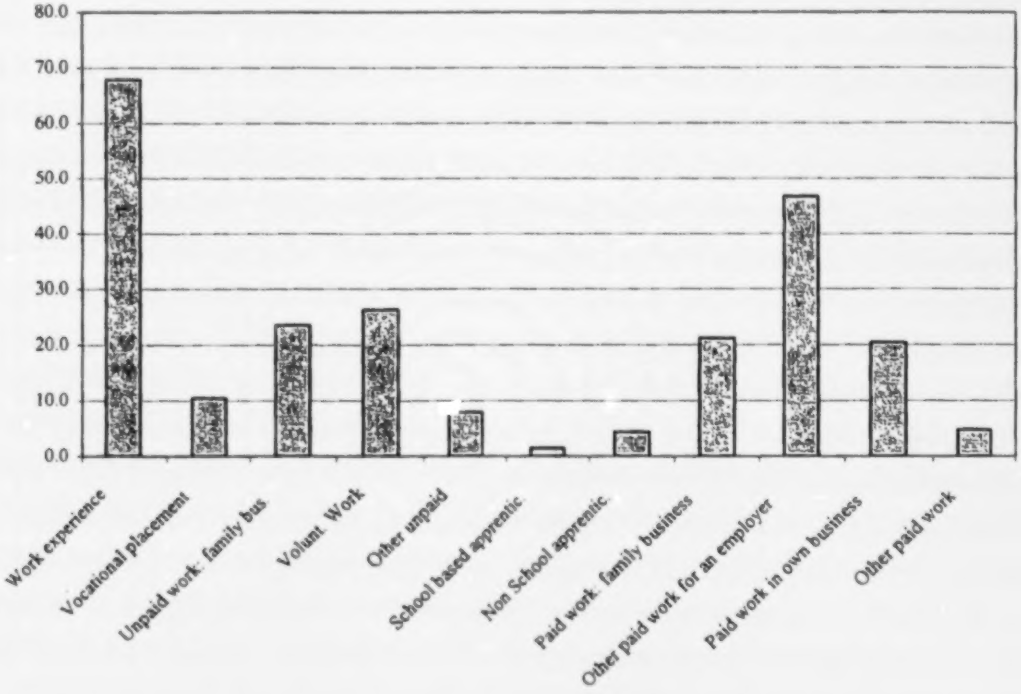

Figure 1: Involvement in different modes of experiencing the workplace (% of all students)

The results show that just over two-thirds of the respondents had done work experience, but only 10.5% had done vocational placements. There were very small numbers involved in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships, with more of these students arranging their own (4.4%) than participating in schools-based programs (1.6%). 46.7% of the students had 'ordinary' part-time work for an employer and one-fifth had their 'own business', which appeared predominantly, but not exclusively, to be babysitting. These data were also analysed by equity groups.

The case studies indicated that most school students in Years 10 to 12 had a considerable amount of workplace activity.[2] Work experience was almost universal in the schools in the case studies; vocational placements were, of course, only undertaken by students who had selected VET courses. Paid work was less universal; generally, schools estimated that around half of students of working age had jobs, as was found in the data.

Table 1 shows the industry area[3] in which students' workplace activities took place. The students were asked to answer for their *longest-lasting* period of work experience, paid job or vocational placement. Some students had difficulty allocating their responses to an industry area; where possible, researchers made appropriate allocations during the data entry process.

Table 1: Industry area of workplace activities

	Work experience		**Paid work**		**Vocational placement**	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Farming, forestry, fishing, mining	31	3.0%	38	5.1%	1	1.4%
Manufacturing	84	8.2%	24	3.2%	16	21.6%
Building including electrical & plumbing	45	4.4%	14	1.9%	7	9.5%
Retailing	183	17.9%	237	31.7%	9	12.2%
Fast foods, cafes, or restaurants	71	6.9%	233	31.2%	27	36.5%
Cultural, recreational or sporting	63	6.2%	45	6.0%	-	-
Banking / real estate / insurance	34	3.3%	6	.8%	-	-
Govt admin' including education & defence	141	13.8%	3	.4%	5	6.8%
Health, personal & community services (including child care)	203	19.9%	29	3.9%	5	6.8%
Communications / media / computing	118	11.5%	16	2.1%	1	1.4%
Babysitting	N/a	N/a	51	6.8%	N/a	N/a
Newspaper delivery	N/a	N/a	22	2.9%	N/a	N/a
Other	49	4.8%	29	3.9%	3	4.1%
Total	1022	100.0%	747	100.0%	74	100.0%

There were clear differences between paid work and work experience. As might be expected, 62.9% of paid student-workers worked in retail or fast food outlets, cafes and restaurants, while only 24.8% of work experience students were in those industries. Work experience placements were far more likely than paid work to be in 'career'-type industries such as education, health, personal and community services. These are industries which do not offer much opportunity for part-time teenage employment. Vocational placements showed a different pattern again. The relatively small number of placement students were clustered in certain industry areas. Retail and fast food/cafes/restaurants covered 48.9% of students so the industry distribution was not unlike paid work.

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[2] Work experience (in some schools) and vocational placements (in most schools) may not be available until Year 11.

[3] The industry areas were slightly adapted from ANZIC codes.

Many of the employers in the focus groups and interviews had well-developed programs for work experience and vocational placements, and took large numbers of students each year[4]. These employers obviously spent much time liaising with schools and local placement coordinators organising programs for students. One employer commented that block periods for vocational placements would enable her to fit in more work experience students in the year, as students on one day a week placements meant those weeks were not available for work experience. She was clearly intent on being as accommodating as possible to students wishing to experience workplaces. In general the employers displayed great willingness to help young people and their schools and derived satisfaction, in most cases more satisfaction from vocational placements than from work experience.

The survey also examined how much responsibility students had in their experiences of work. Paid work offered the greatest opportunities for responsibility, which could simply be related to the length of time spent in that job. Work placement offered more opportunity than work experience for responsibility, but still below paid work. While the fact that some students were only allowed to observe during work experience is to be regretted, the percentage of 4.5% is lower than some commentators have suggested. The quality of what was observed is also of some importance; one student on work experience observed a woman giving birth, which is obviously a profound and important learning experience.

Section 3 of the questionnaire included general questions concerning paid work. These related to how the students found out about their job; why they were working; their employment arrangements; issues about fitting in their school work around their job. Informal methods of job seeking were the major means of finding work. 30.9% found their jobs through a family member, 21.5% through a friend; and 20.6%

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[4] It should be noted that in many cases employers had been recommended to the researchers by schools or education departments and hence may have been examples of 'good practice' host employers.

approached the employer directly. Only 6.9% saw the job advertised in the newspaper, 1.7% on a notice board. 4.9% found out about the job through the school and 13.4% used 'other' means of finding out about the job. The most important reason for seeking the job was overwhelmingly to get spending money. 57.6% cited this reason, 13.1% citing 'general experience of work' as the most important, and 9.0% 'to be more independent'. 9.3% of students worked mainly for money for living expenses, 4.2% because they would enjoy it and 4.0% to get specific experience in an industry they thought they might work in later.

The case studies showed that schools, local coordinators and employers displayed great commitment to organising work experience and vocational placements for school students. Work experience was an almost universal part of school students' curriculum, with only special circumstances preventing participation. Rural schools appear to offer a more flexible and tailor-made approach to students in relation to work experience and vocational placements. This may relate to perceived difficulties in school-to-work transition and, related to this, to perceived difficulties in finding part-time jobs to gain experience of the workplace. In fact, the rural students did not seem to have a lower participation in paid work than the metropolitan students. Some students committed a great deal of time to their part-time jobs while others' participation was only sporadic. Student workers were seen as an integral part of many companies' work forces but in general no special attention was paid to them compared with adult workers.

Employers had comments and criticisms about the way work experience and vocational placements were organised by the schools. They wanted school students to be better prepared, and generally felt that the presence of a third party (for instance Compact coordinators in NSW) assisted students in their preparation and enabled better matching of students to placements. Several of the employers also employed part-time student workers but did not appear to see much link between this and other programs with school students.

The nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences

What students learned

The first aspect to consider is what the students learned in their time in the workplace. Tables 2 and 3 report on student's perceptions of their generic and 'employability' skills.[5]

Table 2: 'Did you develop the following general skills in this period of work experience?'
(by work experience and paid work)

	A lot		Some		A bit		Not at all	
	Work exp	Paid work	Work exp	Paid work	Work exp	Paid work	Work exp	Paid work
Communication/writing	7.4%	13.0%	21.7%	15.2%	19.0%	18.1%	51.8%	54%
Verbal communication	43.9%	63.8%	31.8%	20.8%	18.0%	9.9%	6.4%	5.5%
Planning & organising	22.3%	34.0%	35.8%	35.5%	25.6%	20.1%	16.4%	10%
Working in teams	34.3%	47.5%	28.8%	25.8%	20.9%	13.4%	16.0%	13%
Using your intiative	37.9%	56.2%	34.7%	27.2%	17.9%	11.6%	9.5%	5.0%
Solving problems	23.6%	35.7%	35.9%	32.9%	23.7%	21.2%	16.9%	10%
How to behave at work	46.9%	57.5%	29.0%	22.5%	14.3%	10.3%	9.7%	9.7%

Table 3: 'Did you develop the following general skills in this period of work experience?'
(by work placement)

	A lot	Some	A bit	Not at all
	%	%	%	%
Communication/writing	22.5%	21.1%	26.8%	29.6%
Verbal communication	50.0%	34.7%	9.7%	5.6%
Planning & organising	30.0%	42.9%	12.9%	14.3%
Working in teams	47.9%	28.8%	12.3%	11.0%
Using your intiative	34.7%	40.3%	18.1%	6.9%
Solving problems	24.7%	34.2%	21.9%	19.2%
How to behave at work	47.2%	22.2%	20.8%	9.7%

The results show that similar types of generic skills were developed in the three types of workplace activity, with 'behaving at work', 'verbal communication' and 'using your initiative' all scoring fairly highly, and 'written communication' scoring the lowest. Paid work and vocational placements both had verbal communication as the highest-scoring generic skill, while 'how to behave at work' was equal first for work experience. Overall, paid work appeared to be the most effective in developing generic skills, with vocational placements not far behind. The findings represented in

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[5] The list of skills in the survey combined Mayer Key Competencies (AEC/MOVEET, 1993) and 'employability skills in Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the questionnaire.

Tables 2 and 3 were used to create a generic skills index for each young person.[6] The mean generic skills indices for each type of workplace activity were as follows:

• work experience	12.33
• paid work	13.98
• vocational placements	13.81

Students were also asked about the 'special skills' involved in the 'jobs' they did. This gave some insight into the type of work they were doing. This was an open-ended question and responses were diverse, but some common responses were gathered together into categories during data analysis.

Table 4: Special skills involved in the three types of workplace activities

	Work experience special skills	Paid work special skills	Structured work placement special skills
Communication skills	10.5%	5.4%	8.9%
Dealing with customers	16.7%	48.8%	17.8%
Dealing with clients	4.5%	4.7%	n/a
Displaying patience	3.5%	2.3%	n/a
Operating a cash register	1.0%	4.4%	4.4%
Operating a computer	18.4%	5.9%	15.6%
Operating other	6.3%	4.1%	11.1%
Other	39.1%	24.3%	42.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Paid work involved more students in face to face contact with the public than was the case with students in work placements and work experience. As the table shows, dealing with customers is the priority for students in paid work. When students were asked how well they learned their special skills, vocational placement and paid student workers gave approximately the same results. Work experience was significantly lower.

How they learned

The focus now moves from what students learned to analysing how they learned in the workplace. The survey instrument gave students a number of options about how people learn at work and asked them to pick the three most important for them in the job or experience which they were discussing then rank them in order of importance. Table 5 shows the responses for the first most important only.

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[6] This was calculated by allocating a weighting from student responses –eg 'they learned a lot' was given a weighting of 3 down to 'they learned a bit' at a weighting of 1. This was then multiplied by the 3 types of workplace activities, giving a possible range of 27 to 0.

Table 5: Most important way in which students learned in their workplace activities

	Work experience	Paid work	Work placement
Watching others	25.0%	19.1%	23.2%
Being shown by trainer or supervisor	35.9%	41.8%	44.9%
Being shown by fellow worker(s)	15.2%	14.9%	15.9%
Reading company manuals	.5%	1.7%	
Doing an off the job course	1.3%	1.9%	1.4%
Asking questions of a supervisor	9.2%	5.6%	4.3%
Asking questions of a fellow-worker	4.9%	3.6%	1.4%
Trial and error ('having a go')	4.5%	6.4%	5.8%
Other	.7%	1.2%	
I knew how to do it already from ...	2.7%	3.9%	2.9%

Links between school and work

Students were asked whether they discussed their workplace activities at school, either in class time or informally with friends. As might be expected, since vocational placements were connected with a school course, placement experiences were discussed more in class time than work experience or paid work. Vocational placements were also discussed with friends more. Paid work was the least likely to be discussed in class time, with over two-thirds of respondents saying that they never talked about their work in class, and over a quarter never discussing their work with friends.

Students were asked how much their workplace activities had helped them at school Placement students were asked explicitly about links between their placement and the related course. The data showed close linkages between the two, with a clear indication that the schoolwork helped with the workplace experience more than vice versa. Students were also asked how much their workplace activities had helped them at school more generally. Paid work appeared to be the least help in schoolwork. This could relate to the lack of 'processing' of paid work back in school. However even with paid work, a quarter of students said that their paid jobs had helped them 'a lot' or 'some' at school. Vocational placements came out top with 42.9% saying their placement had helped them 'a lot' or 'some' compared with 30.1% for work experience. Around two out of three students felt work experience was useful despite the fact that they also had a paid job.

In the student focus group interviews, students most often reported being shown by 'the boss' – a manager or supervisor - and by watching other workers. Watching another worker perform a task while explaining it was felt to be a useful learning strategy. An advantage of workplace learning, as opposed to school learning, was that it was generally one-to-one. One student noted that a co-worker could give individual attention and ensure understanding, whereas at school a teacher had to deal with other students simultaneously. The students frequently learned by teaching themselves. Other learning strategies included: trying jobs in different sections or departments, reading company manuals, using a checklist, and formal training sessions. Employers noted that students asked questions, observed other workers, and modelled themselves on existing workers. Learning in the workplace was seen as different from learning at school. Many students appeared to prefer being in the workplace to being at school. Not all did, however, and some students reported increased motivation in schoolwork after periods in the workplace. This was variously because they began to have a clearer idea of what they wanted to do and how school could help them reach their goals, or because they learned that workplaces were hostile environments compared with school and thus appreciated school more.

Conclusion

Generally, students, school staff and employers saw most experiences in the work force in a very positive way. Stakeholders believed that many positive outcomes result from the experience of work for many students while at school. Analysis of the data, found:

- around 60% of school students have had formal paid work;
- without including paid work in family businesses, this figure drops to 50.1%;
- a significant proportion of school students have paid or unpaid work in family businesses (32.6% in all);

- most school students (almost 70%) have done work experience, and both teachers and students saw value in this experience;
- the industries in which students have paid work and vocational placements tend to be different from those where students have work experience opportunities;
- schools, VET coordinators and employers are enthusiastic about school students participating in work placements as part of schooling;
- communication skills and finding out what workplaces are really like are the most important aspects of learning in the workplace;
- students reported that they learned much more in paid work and vocational placements than in work experience; and
- students learned experientially, by watching others and by being shown individually by a trainer or co-worker.

It was evident that students were not very focused on learning in workplaces in any of the three forms of workplace activity. In the focus group interviews, they had to be prompted to think in terms of learning. However, once prompted, some quite perceptive comments were made; for example one student noted the difference between 'people skills' as understood by her fast-food employer and the dentist with whom she did work experience. All of the participants – students, teachers and employers alike - paid less attention to learning in paid work than in work experience or vocational placements, although the period of training was longer in paid work.

When considering the policy framework in which work experience and vocational placements are constructed, the arrangements and opportunities for such vary remarkably. The practical arrangements of implementation occupy much of the energy and time of school staff. The unprecedented explosion of students taking up VET opportunities as part of their senior schooling has lead to a focus on the pragmatics and on programs. Links between school and work, and the intended outcomes of such programs, need to be clarified and made explicit to students and host employers. However, all forms of experience in the workplace offer possible opportunities for students to develop their potential beyond school, which is particularly important for those students who fail to shine within the school system.

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A rural-based teacher education internship: Stressors and coping mechanisms

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study that focused on the lived experiences and concerns of final year Bachelor of Education (Primary) students undertaking a nine-week internship in a rural location. The study had two aims: one, to identify the main sources of stress faced by student teachers as they progressed through the internship; and two, to explore how the student teachers coped with this stress. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were adopted to meet the aims of the study. Qualitative research methods, based on the principles of grounded theory, guided the data collection and analysis. These methods included interviews and diary accounts. An analysis of these data obtained from four student teachers generated five categories of stress, and these categories were also indicative of the coping strategies adopted to deal with stress related to the internship. Quantitative research methods were employed to complement the qualitative approach. The quantitative methods were applied to questionnaire data from the cohort of student teachers (N=54). A response rate of 79.6% was obtained from the questionnaire, and the responses were analysed using factor analysis, a set of one-way ANOVAs, and a content analysis. Four stress factors from the questionnaire were generated, and the effects of age, school size, class year/s taught, and self-rating of academic performance on the stress factors were determined. Four main categories of stress were also derived as a result of the content analysis of the survey data, and five coping strategies employed by the cohort of student teachers were identified. Taken together, the findings provided an insight into the experiences of the student teachers involved in the rural-based internship. The implications of the study are wide ranging, and a number of recommendations arising from the study are outlined.

Introduction

Research has consistently shown that those in the professions, particularly helping professions, have significantly high levels of stress (Gold & Roth, 1993). Teacher stress, more specifically, has become a major concern, with writers such as Gold and Roth (1993) and O'Connor and Clarke (1990), arguing that teaching is one of the most potentially stressful occupations. This is hardly surprising, given its nature. Kyriacou (1987) notes that teacher stress is "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher" (as reported in Woods, 1990, p. 174). O'Connor and Clarke (1990) believe that such frustrations or demands may arise in one or more of four relatively distinct areas of the teacher's occupational role. The areas are: 1. the overall time and workload pressures; 2. the daily interaction with students, including student behaviour problems and coping with the individual demands of students' personal problems; 3. the interaction with fellow professionals within the school and other members of staff; and, 4. the interactions extending outside the school, including relations with the education system and perceptions of negative community attitudes towards teachers individually or the teaching profession generally.

The consequences of a stressor or stressors will depend on the type of coping mechanisms the teacher has developed. Essentially, stress is occurring in those areas where teachers feel that there is little or nothing they can do to remove or modify the stressor and that they must learn to live with the particular stressor (O'Connor & Clarke, 1990). In many instances, teachers have not been trained either to handle their stressors or to develop a variety of successful coping mechanisms.

Given that many researchers now recognise stress as a problem within the teaching profession, it is surprising that limited research exists on student teacher stress. The relevant literature that does exist in this area (based on ERIC and AEI searches) suggests that many student teachers experience stress, particularly during the 'practicum' (Costin, Fogarty, & Yarrow, 1993, 1992; MacDonald, 1993; Morris & Morris, 1980; Murray-Harvey, Silins, & Saebel, 1999; Regan, 1989).

A review of both overseas and Australian research literature on student teacher stress highlights a number of stressors for student teachers during the practicum. These common stressors include: fear of not fulfilling self expectations (Costin et al. 1992; Murray-Harvey et al. 1999; Sinclair & Nicoll, 1981); workload (Costin et al. 1992; D'Rozario & Wong, 1996; Morris & Morris, 1980); being evaluated (D'Rozario & Wong, 1996; MacDonald, 1993; Sinclair & Nicoll, 1981); lack of time for preparation (Costin et al., 1992; D'Rozario & Wong, 1996); and, relationships with others (Sinclair & Nicoll, 1981; Sumsion & Thomas, 1995).

The above-mentioned literature also indicates that teacher education programs in this country and overseas vary in their structure and duration, and contain, in varying proportions, 'practical experiences'. The practicums discussed in the studies ranged in length from one day a week, for eight weeks, as in the study conducted by a team of academics from Queensland University of Technology (Costin et al., 1993), to a six-week teaching block as investigated in a South Australian context (Murray-Harvey et al., 1999). Research on extended block practical experiences is notably lacking.

Few studies have monitored how student teacher stress may change over time. Morris and Morris (1980, p. 58) found that "generally, the level of stress declines near the end of the student teaching experience", whilst Sinclair and Nicoll (1981) recorded that initial 'anxiety' is high and, in the course of the teaching practice, some reduction in anxiety is achieved.

A Survey of Practicum Stresses (SPS) has been used by a number of researchers in investigating student teacher stress during the practicum. D'Rozario and Wong (1996) first developed and used the SPS to examine areas of stress experienced by first year teacher education students in Singapore. The SPS was then used in an adapted form by Murray-Harvey et al. (1999) in South Australia comparing Singaporean and Australian student concerns relating to practice teaching. The focus in their paper was a cohort of students completing its first practicum. Significant differences between the stressors experienced by Singaporean and Australian students point to the need to understand student stress within the cultural context. In another study conducted by Murray-Harvey, Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield, and Russell (1999), data were gathered from Australian teacher education students enrolled at Flinders University. In this study, responses were gained from undergraduate and graduate-entry students during two teaching experience placements — their first practicum and during their second practicum. Examination of the data found that there was a significant reduction in stress from the first to the second practicum for both student cohorts.

It is surprising to find that despite the increasingly serious phenomenon of student teacher stress, and the importance of practicums in teacher education programs, very little research has been undertaken to study the coping strategies employed by student teachers to manage stress related to the teaching practicum. Sumsion and Thomas (1995) carried out a study with early childhood student teachers from Macquarie University, New South Wales. This study explored the feasibility of having teacher educators assist student teachers in developing skills to manage stress specifically associated with the practicum. Morris and Morris (1980) made eight suggestions as to how university supervisors and supervising teachers could help the student teacher to cope with stress during student teaching. These included: 1. establish and maintain open communications among the student teacher, supervising teacher, and university supervisor; 2. encourage students to schedule some time each day for themselves; 3. provide opportunities for student teachers to share their experiences; 4. encourage student teachers to get sufficient amounts of exercise, rest and sleep; 5. encourage or even require that students prepare unit and lesson plans well in advance; 6. encourage student teachers to engage in regular, in-depth self evaluation; 7. provide inservice programs and opportunities for supervising teachers and university supervisors to develop competencies in assessing classroom environments for source of stress, recognising stress symptoms, and assisting student teachers in developing coping skills; and, 8. provide a comprehensive orientation program to student teaching.

More recently, MacDonald (1993) identified communication, conformity, initiative, goal setting, and relaxation techniques as strategies for coping with stress. In conducting this Canadian study, MacDonald examined the students' perspectives using a number of sources, namely, focus group interviews, observation visits, and journal writings. Little research in this area has been concerned with seeking information directly from those affected. It could be argued that the less able students may not be as equipped to buffer stress as their more able counterparts; however, no study has been reported in the literature to test such a claim.

It therefore appears evident that there is a need for research that focuses on student teacher stress, and particularly how student teachers cope with stress during the practicum. The few studies that have been conducted in this area have generally used quantitative methods to examine the problem, exposing the need for a study that focuses more on the 'lived experiences' of student teachers during their internship. Those studies which have incorporated interview data (see e.g., MacDonald, 1993; Sumsion & Thomas, 1995) have generally failed to provide an indepth picture of the reality of student teachers' stressors and experiences. Further, as no study has used an extended practicum in a rural location as its focus, it is timely to conduct such a study. Consequently, this study has two aims: to identify the main sources of stress faced by student teachers as they progress through the internship; and, to explore how the student teachers cope with the stress associated with the term-long internship. The results of this study have implications for tertiary educators and other professionals concerned with the preparation and professional development of teachers.

Method

a. Participants

Fifty-four student teachers formed the participant sample being drawn from fourth year B.Ed. (Primary) students who undertook the Charles Sturt University (Riverina) rural-based 2000 Internship program. This sample was approached to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A for sections of this instrument).

From this sample, a sub-sample of four students was asked to participate in an indepth case study. The selection of the participants for the case study was to some extent constrained by what Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 66) refer to as "structural conditions". They maintain that the ideal is to be able to choose different groups, individuals or situations as the data dictate. The interns were selected on the basis of a number of criteria, namely, school setting, year level or levels of class and intern age.

All participants were assured that their names, the name of the school in which they were placed, and the names of all other individuals (i.e., students, mentor, liaison lecturer, etc.) would not be used. Each questionnaire was identified by an ID number, which related to an intern. The names of schools were not requested by the researcher.

b. Procedure

Contrasting methods were used to gather and analyse the data in this study. By making use of contrasting methods, viz., qualitative and quantitative methods, the researchers attempted to raise the chances of providing data that were more accurate.

Qualitative approach

According to Kemmis (1983, p. 75) case study research is "a process of truth-seeking ... it is an empirical exercise ...". Case study research techniques (viz., interviews and diary accounts) were adopted for this study because they allowed the researchers to explore the lived experiences of a group of student teachers who existed within the 'bounded system' of the internship.

- Interviews

Interviews with the student teachers were conducted over a nine-week period and were semi-structured and informal in nature. The study relied on three interviews: at the beginning, in the middle, and towards the end of the internship. The length of each interview varied among participants, although most were approximately one hour in length. All interviews were conducted in a neutral area; however, specific times and places were selected by each participant. These interviews were audio-taped with the permission of each participant sought at the commencement of each interview.

Using an open-ended style, the researchers asked student teachers to talk about their early experiences and perspectives on the internship. No specific interview schedules were used. In this way, the interviews were flexible and creative and provided the basis for further developing friendships with the interns (Roberts, 1991). The data collected from these interviews allowed the researchers to list issues that warranted additional treatment and expansion in subsequent interviews. The second set of informal interviews consisted of loosely-structured questions, developed partly as a result of responses to the formal questionnaire (see quantitative section for further details). These second interviews occurred at the completion of week five of the nine-week internship with all participants.

- Diary accounts

Participants were asked to use a diary to record 'critical incidents' (Oxtoby, 1979, as cited in Bell, 1999) which occurred during each day. They were also encouraged to use the diary to produce a record of the internship experiences and concerns about which they felt the researchers should know. Along with the critical incidents approach, the diaries were used as a preliminary base-point to the other interviews.

Two of the four interns regularly wrote in their diaries, and maintained lengthy entries, describing their feelings and reflecting on their experiences. Another intern kept brief notes, making seven entries only during the first two weeks of the study. The fourth intern did not make any entries, and this decision was respected.

Personal identifiers were removed from the diaries and replaced with code names. The diary accounts were then transcribed onto computer disk, remaining secure in accordance with ethical principles (Burgess, 1989).

Quantitative approach

Writers such as de Vaus (1991), Hemmings (1994), and Lancy (1993) have noted that quantitative methods can make a significant contribution to qualitative studies. Further support comes from Merriam (1988) when she proposes that:

> *Quantitative data from surveys or other instruments can be used to support findings from qualitative data* (p. 68).

In the current study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the participant sample, and the once only survey was also utilised to guide further qualitative data gathering. The first part of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate biographical characteristics such as age, gender, school size and year level/s of class. The second section of the survey asked interns to respond, voluntarily, to a number of open-ended questions concerning stressors experienced in the internship. The third section of the questionnaire consisted of the 29-item SPS as developed by D'Rozario and Wong (1996), and later adapted by Murray-Harvey et al. (1999). Slight modifications were made to the wording of the items to suit the research context, and two items, (viz., *Writing detailed lesson plans* and *Managing practicum related assignments*) were deleted due to their irrelevance to the internship. Thus, the modified SPS comprised of 27 items representing experiences related to the extended practicum that interns may have faced during the first few weeks of teaching.

Interns were asked to rate how often each of the 27 'itemised' experiences may have stressed them in the early part of the internship. Responses were indicated on a four point Likert scale. The scale: 1 - Never Stressed Me, 2 - Stressed Me Some of the Time, 3 - Stressed Me Most of the Time, and 4 - Stressed Me all the Time.

Following the SPS, respondents were asked to respond to a number of open-ended questions concerning strategies they may have used to cope with stress during the internship. The last section, section five, asked interns to indicate, on average, their academic performance thus far at university.

The questionnaire was sent to the 54 interns in approximately week three of the nine-week internship, along with a covering letter explaining the nature of the research, and a stamped self-addressed envelope. Student teachers were advised that completing the questionnaire was voluntary, and as such 43 of the 54 questionnaires sent were returned to the researchers, representing a response rate of 79.6 per cent. This is deemed appropriate, as according to Wiersma (1986), 70 per cent is the minimum response rate when surveying a professional population.

The responses on the SPS were subjected to a factor analysis which was used to generate four 'stress' scores. These scores were then used as the dependent variables in a series of one-way ANOVAs with various independent variables (viz., age, gender, school size, and class year/s taught) to determine where there were significant differences in the stress scores. In this way it was possible to identify relationships between the set of independent variables (background variables) and the participants' stress scores.

Results

a. Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative approach used in this study was directed by the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and their notion of grounded theory. It must be noted that these strategies guided the analysis and were not applied in the same way as they would in a true grounded theory study. Three strategies of grounded theory (viz., theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical saturation) were drawn upon to allow the researchers to collect data which reflected the experiences of the student teachers during their internship, and to permit the researchers to analyse the stressors experienced and the coping strategies employed by interns.

The early stages of analysis revealed 14 categories. This 'shopping list' of categories describes the data at a very simple level of conceptualisation (Woods, 1986). These emergent categories provided the researchers with direction for further data collection and, at the same time, data to generate categories (Lord, 1996; McAndrew, 1998).

In unison with the process of theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis was also conducted. The next step in the analytical processes was to achieve a greater level of delimination and refinement while, at the same time, seeking to establish linkages and relationships between and among categories (Hunt, 2000).

The secondary and final categories that were refined and re-categorised are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Final categories and their properties

FINAL CATEGORIES	PROPERTIES
External Factors	Family commitments, personal background, accommodation, finances, public perceptions of teachers
University	Liaison lecturer, university commitments, course structure, academic performance
Relationships with Staff and Students	Mentor, class teacher, staff perceptions, students' perceptions, status/identification, coping – school support, school context
Managing Teacher Roles and Responsibilities	Routines, marking/assessing students' work, playground/bus duties, programming, assembly, behaviour management, managing students' with special needs, managing time, managing workload
Coping Strategies – Outside School	Health issues, communicating with others outside school, relaxation/recreational activities, reflection

The researchers felt that data had been verified and sufficient data had been gathered to fully explore the issues relevant to the research, and felt that they had worked towards theoretical saturation.

b. Quantitative data analysis

Some of the data obtained from the questionnaire (see SECTIONS 2 and 4) were content analysed manually. The remaining data (see SECTIONS 1, 3, and 5) were coded and computer analysed. The items comprising the SPS (see SECTION 3) were labelled using a maximum of seven characters as required for SPSS variable labelling. The items and their respective labels are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: SPS items and codes

Item No.	SPS ITEMS	Code
1	Managing the class and enforcing discipline	DISCIP
2	Delivering the lesson	DELIV
3	Managing groupwork	GROUP
4	Managing the individual seatwork	ISEAT
5	Establishing rapport with students	RAPP
6	Giving appropriate feedback to students	FEED
7	Marking students' written work	MARK
8	Teaching mixed ability classes	MIXED
9	Helping students with learning difficulties	LDIFF
10	Helping students with emotional/behavioural problems	EMOTBE
11	Communicating concepts to students	COMCON
12	Having high expectations of my teaching performance	EXPECT
13	Overall teaching workload	WLOAD
14	Managing time	TIME
15	Striking balance between practicum and personal commitments	BALAN
16	Selecting appropriate content for my lessons	CONTEN
17	Preparing resources for my lessons	RESOUR
18	Others expecting me to perform tasks beyond my competency	PERFOR
19	Being observed by my liaison lecturer	OBSLL
20	Being evaluated by my liaison lecturer	EVALL
21	Communicating with and relating to my liaison lecturer	COMLL
22	Being observed by my mentor	OBSMEN
23	Being evaluated by my mentor	EVAMEN
24	Communicating with/relating to my mentor	COMMEN
25	Fear of failing the practicum	FAIL
26	Communicating with/relating to teachers in the school	COMTEA
27	Communicating with/relating to Principal/School Executive	COMPRI

The data derived from SECTION 1 and SECTION 5 of the questionnaire were also coded, and the conversion of the data from words to numbers can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Coding of questionnaire items in SECTION 1 and SECTION 5

VALUE LABELS	VALUES/CODES
SECTION 1	
Age range (AGE)	21-25 = 1 26+ = 2
Gender (GENDER)	Male = 1 Female = 2
School Size (total school enrolment) (SIZE)	10-150 = 1 150+ = 2
Class year/s taught (YEAR)	Predominantly Stage 1 = 1 Predominantly Stage 2 and 3 = 2
SECTION 5	
Self-rating of academic performance (GRADE)	Low Grade = 1 High Grade = 2

Factor analysis

Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black (1998) argue that a sample size of 300 is needed when 27 variables are included in a factor analysis. In order to overcome the limitation of a relatively small sample size, a selective examination was made of the intercorrelation matrices and this led to a factor analysis being undertaken with 11 variables (viz., DELIV, FEED, MIXED, EMOTBE, WLOAD, OBSLL, COMLL, EVALL, OBSMEN, EVAMEN, and COMMEN).

The factor analysis was made possible in this study by subjecting the cluster of variables to a principal components analysis using the SPSS program titled Factor Analysis (SPSS, 2000). The factors were extracted using a scree test and an eigenvalue specification of 1.0 plus, and were rotated using the varimax criterion (Hair et al., 1998; Kim & Mueller, 1978). Four factors, termed i) University Evaluation, ii) School Evaluation, iii) Managing Workload and Roles, and iv) Catering for Individual Differences, emerged from this analysis. These four factors explained approximately 75% of the total variance in the factor analysis. The factor loadings of the constituent variables on the four factors are reported below.

Table 4: Factor loadings for the SPS items in the 4 factors

Code	COMPONENT				Factor Label
	1	2	3	4	
OBSLL COMLL EVALL	.898 .894 .888				University Evaluation
OBSMEN EVAMEN COMMEN		.834 .826 .728			School Evaluation
WLOAD DELIV			.900 .734		Managing Workload and Roles
EMOTBE MIXED				.856 .760	Catering for Individual Differences

NB: FEED was not included because it did not load meaningfully or substantially on any of the factors.

ANOVA

A set of one-way ANOVAs was undertaken to test the effects of the four independent variables, viz., AGE, SIZE, YEAR, and GRADE, on the four dependent variables that were the standardised factor scores measuring the four stress variables. Except for one case, there were no significant group results across any of the four factors. The significant effect related to GRADE (low grade/high grade). That is, students with higher grades (HD and DI) were more stressed with regard to school-based evaluation during the internship than those interns with lower grades (F = 4.494, p = .04). The results, taken as whole, indicate that AGE, SIZE, YEAR, and GRADE do not significantly affect the stress levels of interns.

Content analysis

Content analysis investigates the thematic content of documents which serves as a basis of inference (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Such an analysis may be used in the context of a qualitative or a quantitative approach (Sarantakos, 1998). In this study, a content analysis was related to the latter approach and drew on responses to the open-ended questions posed in the questionnaire. These responses were content analysed and the results of this analysis are reported for the following set of questions:

1. What do you consider to be the main cause of stress during the internship so far?

The analysis of the intern's comments to these questions indicated four main categories of cause: i) Roles and Responsibilities; ii) Managing Time and Workload; iii) Costs/Living Away from Home; and iv) Students' Behaviour. A fifth category was also developed in relation to a 'mixed-bag' of causes, and was hence labelled 'Miscellaneous'. A total of 58 comments was categorised, and the categorisation of comments is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Comments made by interns about the main cause of stress during the internship

CATEGORY	NO. OF RESPONSES	EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS MADE
Teaching Roles and Responsibilities	15	"Size of my class and being Kinder". "Trying to fit into school structure". "Remembering all the little things". "Managing 3 class levels at the same time".
Managing Time and Workload	13	"I've found the hours of work quite stressful". "Not getting through enough work". "The workload". "Finding the time to fit everything in".
Costs/Living Away from Home	5	"Hard to find cheap accommodation". "Travelling expenses". "Having to go home and work".
Students' Behaviour	16	"Maintaining a level of discipline and ensuring it is adhered to". "Working out strategies that work". "Two individual children who continually disrupt the class".
Miscellaneous	9	"Passing - getting a good report". "Teaching Yr 9/10 computer studies". "Fitting in with staff". "Lack of sleep".

2. What other stressors have you experienced?

Forty-four comments were categorised in response to this question. An analysis of the comments identified six categories of response as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Categorisation of interns' responses

CATEGORY	NO. OF COMMENTS	SPECIFIC POINT
Teaching Roles and Responsibilities	10	Assessment Programming Teaching mixed grades Remembering routines
Students' Behaviour	7	Swearing Attitudes of students Noise levels
Time Management — School and Other	7	Fitting in all KLAs/assessment Juggling normal life Lack of time to do everything
Performance	6	Expectations of others Wondering whether doing right thing
External Factors	9	Fatigue Assignments Costs Transport
Miscellaneous	5	Isolation Computer technology

An analysis of the responses to these two questions revealed that whilst the 'main' source of stress may not be the same for all interns, overall, similar stressors may be experienced to varying degrees.

3. What strategies have you used to cope with stress experienced in the internship?

Five categories of response to this question were identified, and a total of 85 comments was coded and categorised (see Table 7).

Table 7: Categorisation of comments relating to coping with stress

CATEGORY	NO. OF COMMENTS
Communicating with Others	28
Self – help	21
Relaxation/Recreation	17
Teaching and Managing	11
Organisation	8

The above table shows that the main coping strategy for interns was categorised as 'Communicating with Others', noting that 'others' consisted of a range of people. This is evident in the following quote: "*... communication is a big coping strategy — talking to other staff especially mentor, class teacher, Principal, sometimes other staff and in particular my mum and dad and my boyfriend (evening cleaning staff to a* *small degree)"*. Through discussion, interns felt they were able to release and share their concerns with others. Through sharing, interns may have found that they were not alone in their experiences.

By addressing the stressor, the problem may seem less severe, although if the stressor is unknown, this may be difficult. Self-help strategies such as reflection may help identify the stressor and become a form of coping as indicated in the following comment: *"I have tried to evaluate what is causing the stress"*. Generally, comments categorised as 'Self-help' reflect the notion that a positive approach is important in dealing with stress, and is apparent in the following brief quotes made by different interns: *"Adopt a positive attitude"* and *"Believe in yourself"*.

The third most adopted coping strategy as categorised by the researcher, was 'Relaxation/Recreation'. A number of activities were expressed as helpful in coping with stress and responses included watching TV, playing playstation, socialising, meditating, eating, sleeping, spending time with family, reading, sightseeing and having a bath. These activities were seen as time-out activities where interns were able to 'switch off' from school.

Approximately 13 per cent of the intern responses to the question on coping indicated that teaching and managing techniques helped them to cope with the stress experienced during the internship. Such techniques were coded and categorised as 'Teaching and Managing'. One intern felt that you should "*not leave anything unresolved for another time*", whilst another way of dealing with stress, as indicated by another intern, was to "*approach each issue in small ways and continually*".

The fifth category that was developed as a result of the content of the responses to the above question, was titled 'Organisation'. Not as many comments were recorded as part of this category compared with the other four, however, some people identified over-planning, utilising time effectively, setting goals, planning back-up activities and generally being prepared, as ways of coping with stress. Although a number of coping strategies have been identified above, it is not overly clear how they worked or how effective they were.

Discussion

Based on the literature relating to studies of student teacher stress and coping strategies, a number of factors were identified as causes of the stress experienced during practicum situations. Along with D'Rozario and Wong (1996) and Murray-Harvey et al. (1999), who have used the SPS to investigate student teacher stress during the practicum, the current researchers derived a 4-factor model from the data. Table 8 highlights how the results of the factor analysis in this study compare to D'Rozario and Wong's (1996) 7-factor model and the 4-factor model presented by Murray-Harvey et al. (1999). It needs emphasising that each factor is derived from the SPS items that encompass it, and whilst the factor labels may be different in some cases, the similarities in the studies' findings remain evident. Table 8 also presents the five categories that were developed as a result of the processes of grounded theory which provided the guidance for the analysis of qualitative data collected.

Table 8: Summary of findings

Quantitative Data			**Qualitative Data**
Factor Analytic Model This study	Murray-Harvey et al.	D'Rozario and Wong	*Grounded Theory Approach* This study
1. University Evaluation	1. Teaching	1. Overall Performance	1. External Factors
2. School Evaluation	2. Preparation	2. Workload	2. University
3. Managing Workload and Roles	3. University Evaluation	3. New Colleagues	3. Relationships with Staff and Students
4. Catering for Individual Differences	4. School Evaluation	4. Cooperating Teacher	4. Managing Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
		5. Supervisor	5. Coping Strategies — Outside school
		6. Teaching and Managing	
		7. Helping	

The factor analytic model of this study portrays four different variable sets which encapsulate the major sources of stress experienced by interns when placed in a rural school setting. These categories are consistent with much of the literature, although limited, that exists on student teacher stress.

The interviews were useful in providing information about changes in stressors over time. It appears that uncertainty and hence, stress, diminishes over time. During the nine-week internship, the researchers were able to seek the different sources of stress experienced by interns at four different times — approximately after week 1, week 3, week 5 and week 9 of the internship. Overall, the experiences of the intern were considerably less stressful towards the end of the internship. This finding is in accord with the work of Morris and Morris (1980, p. 58) who found that "generally, the level of stress declines near the end of the student teaching experience".

A content analysis revealed the following five categories of coping strategy: Communicating with Others, Self-help, Relaxation/Recreation, Teaching and Managing and lastly, Organisation. Communication was also found by MacDonald (1993) to be a strategy that students employ to deal with stress, as was relaxation.

A set of one-way ANOVAs was undertaken to test the effects of four separate independent variables, namely, AGE, SIZE, YEAR, and GRADE, on the four dependent variables that were the standardised factor scores measuring the four stress variables. There were no significant results for the four factors in relation to AGE. The literature that exists on the relationship between age and stress (Gold & Roth, 1993; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982 as cited in O'Connor & Clarke, 1990) indicates that there are many inconsistencies, with some studies noting no difference whilst others showing a significant relationship. Also, for YEAR there were no significant results in this study. This is not in accord with a study conducted by D'Rozario and Wong (1996) who found that there was a relationship between the amount of stress experienced and the year level of classes taught. They found that teaching at the lower primary level was stressful, especially for the men, and also that teaching at both the lower and upper primary levels seemed to have been stressful for both male and female student teachers. It needs to be stressed that the 1996 study was undertaken in Singapore and the student teachers were less experienced in terms of practicum compared with the cohort in this study.

In relation to SIZE, the results were nearing significance for two factors viz., University Evaluation and Catering for Individual Differences. However, there was a significant effect on School Evaluation related to GRADE. Whilst no other study has been conducted to determine the relationship between the stress experienced by student teachers and academic achievement, the relationship between personal factors and stress has been examined by O'Connor and Clarke (1990). They found that teachers who have a need for achievement are more stress prone. This appears to be consistent with the fact that in this study, those interns with higher self-rated academic performance were more stressed than those with lower self-ratings.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggest that all primary school staff members need to be aware of the stressors that interns may encounter during the term-long internship; they should be sensitive to the individual needs of interns; and, be able to offer assistance and support to interns, and monitor the perception of interns, especially monitoring the extent to which interns' expectations are being fulfilled. Hence, this study could better inform school personnel how they can maximise the overall experience of the internship, and play a role in reducing some of the sources of stress that lie beyond the immediate control of the intern.

Without explicit knowledge and understanding of the stressors experienced during the internship, and the coping strategies used by interns to cope with that stress, educators cannot attempt to meet their charges' needs. To date, university staff have done what they perceive would benefit student teachers during the practicum, yet this research study suggests that the perception of the intern should be of prime focus. Seeking feedback from interns should be viewed as a critical component of course design, evaluation and improvement. Through an increased understanding of student teacher concerns and realities, teacher educators will be better informed of ways in which to improve their teacher education programs (Murray-Harvey et al., 1999). The frank accounts of the interns' experiences provide a valuable basis for refining practicum requirements and organisation, and add to the current knowledge base about internship programs. This information may be useful in identifying those student teachers most in need of interventions aimed at ameliorating specific areas of concern, and may also have implications for placement decisions.

Interns' concerns should come to the attention of all parties interested in improving the internship and education per se. If the education systems are to pursue excellence, attention must be given to the needs of interns. District and state system administrators can deal with issues directly affecting the quality of instruction such as class size, behaviour management, excessive administration tasks, and non-teaching duties. They could also work toward consensus statements that would be in the best interests of all stakeholders in the internship. The information in this study could inform future directions for practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

As a result of this study the following recommendations have been suggested:

- Inservice mentors, teachers, and liaison lecturers to develop shared understandings of the internship program and expectations of all involved.
- Develop and implement pre-internship stress management sessions that could help interns generate/use appropriate resources and coping skills and hence allow interns to gain the maximum advantage from the internship.
- As the internship program evolves, collaborate and strengthen the links between school personnel and those in the university setting to ensure that the goals of all are complementary, and that all parties have a vested interest in the education of primary school teachers.

This study has fulfilled the aims that were set out at the beginning and which guided the conduct of the research. The experiences of interns as they progressed through the Charles Sturt University (Riverina) rural-based 2000 Internship program resulted in some interesting insights about the stressors in a teaching practicum and the coping strategies adopted by interns. Hence, this study has made a contribution by adding depth to the available data on the experiences of student teachers. Although this study has filled a gap in the literature pertaining to stress and the coping strategies adopted by interns during the internship, the field is still ripe for further investigation.

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

SECTION 1

Age range: (please tick where appropriate)
21-25 [ ]
26-30 [ ]
31-35 [ ]
36-40 [ ]
40+ [ ]

Gender: (please tick)
Male [ ]
Female [ ]

School size: (total student enrolment) ________________

Class year/s taught: ____________________

SECTION 2

What do you consider to be the main cause of stress during the internship so far?

____
____
____

Why?

____
____
____

What other stressors have you experienced?

____
____
____

SECTION 3

Please indicate how often you may have found the following situations stressful in your internship (so far). For each item, please circle the most appropriate number.

1	Never Stressed Me
2	Stressed Me Some of the Time
3	Stressed Me Most of the Time
4	Stressed Me All the Time

1.	Managing the class and enforcing discipline	1	2	3	4
2.	Delivering the lesson	1	2	3	4
3.	Managing groupwork	1	2	3	4
4.	Managing the individual seatwork	1	2	3	4
5.	Establishing rapport with students	1	2	3	4
6.	Giving appropriate feedback to students	1	2	3	4
7.	Marking students' written work	1	2	3	4
8.	Teaching mixed ability classes	1	2	3	4
9.	Helping students with learning difficulties	1	2	3	4
10.	Helping students with emotional/behavioural problems	1	2	3	4
11.	Communicating concepts to students	1	2	3	4
12.	Having high expectations of my teaching performance	1	2	3	4
13.	Overall teaching workload	1	2	3	4
14.	Managing time	1	2	3	4
15.	Striking balance between practicum and personal commitments	1	2	3	4
16.	Selecting appropriate content for my lessons	1	2	3	4
17.	Preparing resources for my lessons	1	2	3	4

18.	Others expecting me to perform tasks beyond my competency	1	2	3	4
19.	Being observed by my liaison lecturer	1	2	3	4
20.	Being evaluated by my liaison lecturer	1	2	3	4
21.	Communicating with and relating to my liaison lecturer	1	2	3	4
22.	Being observed by my mentor	1	2	3	4
23.	Being evaluated by my mentor	1	2	3	4
24.	Communicating with/relating to my mentor	1	2	3	4
25.	Fear of failing the practicum	1	2	3	4
26.	Communicating with/relating to teachers in the school	1	2	3	4
27.	Communicating with/relating to Principal/School Executive	1	2	3	4

SECTION 4

What strategies have you used to cope with stress experienced during the internship?

Do you think the coping strategies you have used have been effective? Please explain.

SECTION 5

What grade would be most prevalent on your current academic transcript? (please tick)

HD [ ]
DI [ ]
CR [ ]
PS [ ]

What grade would be the second most prevalent? (please tick)

HD [ ]
DI [ ]
CR [ ]
PS [ ]

Thank you for your time and consideration in completing this questionnaire.

NOTE: Please place the questionnaire in the enclosed self addressed, stamped envelope

Online support for action research in a teacher education internship in rural Australia

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Abstract

The two themes of this paper are action research and online learning support in teacher internships in rural Australia. A model for the interaction of professional practice, the workplace and the university (Lee, Green & Brennan, 2000) came to inform the conceptualisation of a new final year teacher education unit which uses action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) as a learning process for interns (cf Beisser, 2000; Grundy, 1995). This year long unit requires support in the first semester as internal students explore action research and identify potential areas for their improvement. In second semester interns (placed in ten-week internships almost exclusively in rural schools) are supported as they undertake action research to improve their practice. The unit has been piloted three times with small groups prior to full implementation in 2001. A move to online communication as the University's key support mechanism for interns at distant workplaces, and as an on-campus learning strategy, was instituted in 2001. This paper reports upon:

1. conceptual developments following pilots of a pre-service unit in which action research during students' internship is the culminating feature;
2. online learning support for one student group's action research projects while on their internship; and
3. early results from the action research project on online learning of neophyte teachers as internal students prior to their experience as interns.

Our move into online work, on campus and off campus in rural areas, has proved to be of particular benefit to most students. The early data vindicate this move in that (a) the students appreciated being 'forced' to read and (b) bulletin boards can provide support for complex projects while off campus.

Introduction

To become a professional teacher several competencies are expected including a strong knowledge base, diversified social, communication and cooperation skills, flexibility to work in different contexts, reflective practice and the capacity to manage information, self and others (McLoughlin & Luca, 2000). According to the Ramsey Report (2000) on NSW teacher education, neophyte teachers can achieve these through

> *more professional experience in the workplace if New South Wales is to have an effective system of teacher education. ... Experienced teachers and teacher educators must work more closely together. ... The present practicum model in teacher education courses is failing to prepare effectively future teachers for the challenges that they face* (p. 10).

There have been major reports such as *Schooling in Rural Australia* (Boomer, 1988) and *Schooling in Rural Western Australia* (Tomlinson, 1994) and more recently the *Report of the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* (Sidoti, 2000) underlining these kinds of concerns, and more, with particular reference to rural and remote Australia. Such developments and debates need to be understood within an international context (Yarrow, Ballantyne, Hansford, Herschell, & Millwater, 1999) and to the national restructuring processes (Howley 1997). Even in these changing times, teachers **are** required for rural and remote locations yet many neophyte teachers in these contexts suffer from 'socio-cultural dislocation' (Yarrow et al., 1999) and professional isolation (Maxwell & Bennett, 2000).

Alongside this sustained pressure to locate teacher pre-service in the professional workplace, the importance of establishing the value of integrating information technology for pre-service teacher education programs is well documented in the literature (Kay & Mellar, 1994; Robertson, 1996; Stuhlmann, 1998). In these studies, the focus has been on ensuring that teachers have information literacy skills and understand how technology can be employed in pedagogical approaches. A limited number of reports have focussed on the use of multimedia and online technology to develop professional skills among teachers (McLoughlin et al., 2000; Selinger 1996). Pearson concludes that "research is needed to explore ways in which this new medium might contribute to the acquisition and maintenance of professional knowledge"(1999, p. 222). Thus, the present project is intended to contribute to extant research on innovative approaches to teacher education.

In rural and remote settings the Internet has increased importance in teacher education since schools in NSW have been connected. Furthermore, placing [this is a little unclear - in what sense are these institutions being reconnected?] schools, TAFE, and universities into closer relationships acknowledges the potential of the new knowledges, i.e., where workers are legitimately seen as knowledge producers rather than as knowledge consumers (Scott, 1997). The unit/course entitled the 'Teaching Project' at the University of New England features both Internet support and the potential for new knowledges to impact on pre-service teachers since the major part of the unit is complementary to the ten week final semester internship.

The Teaching Project unit was developed so that the students would have:

- reviewed *professional attributes* profiles and their practicum reports, and created a profile of their own professional attributes;
- identified those which might be improved;
- described and justified a suitable methodology by which the chosen skill development could be addressed;
- justified the planned improvements in teaching technique, with reference to the relevant literature of the aspects of practice chosen;
- described the implementation of the planned improvements, evaluated the evidence by which their impact was assessed; and
- made judgements about what the next action should be in the ongoing development of their professional competence.

These objectives were far more professionally focussed than the university unit on action research reported by Beisser (2000) in the USA. Beisser's students focussed much more strongly upon the development of subject knowledge. We see our objectives as consistent with the move to the new knowledges because they are largely achieved (or not) in the culminating experience of doing action research on site (often in rural or remote communities) and subsequently producing a report based upon that work. Our work in the unit was based upon Grundy's (1995) work on action research in the National Project for Quality Teaching and Learning. There she set out a rationale for the use of action research with teachers. We have extended this professionally-oriented action research into teacher pre-service linked with the internship.

Outcomes from early pilots

We had several opportunities to pilot the unit as it was developed and in doing so learned a number of key lessons.

1. Students could not identify which specific competency their action research would focus upon until they had been in the school for some time. Thus the situational analysis of the school and class were important elements to add to the review of their own practices (conducted on campus using the *National Competency Framework for Beginning Teaching* (NPQTL 1996) as a checklist). This was a timely reminder that decisions about what needed to be improved had to be situated, i.e., grounded *in the workplace*.
2. A highly motived and strongly conceptually oriented student showed the advantage of thinking of situational analysis and reconnaissance as different concepts. Her concept map of the action research process, used as an exercise just prior to the internship, had differentiated between these two by allocating reconnaissance to the review of competencies and situational analysis to the evaluation of the school community and classroom. This extended the Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) model of action research, in which reconnaissance was the general term used for these two processes, and added a valuable dimension which is useful in the context of a pre-service teacher education.

The second point is largely heuristic but the first, in particular, pointed to the need for a stronger conceptual framework for our unit.

Conceptual framework

The key work by Alison Lee, Bill Green and Marie Brennan in *Research and knowledge at work: Perspectives, case studies and innovative strategies* provided the conceptual way forward. Their work focussed upon professional doctoral education as in-service education. Here we apply it to pre-service education. It recognises the importance of the new knowledges and largely follows from Gibbons and colleagues (1994), and others, in which professional learning is constituted as Mode 2 knowledge, which is

> *produced in (the) context of application; transdisciplinary; heterogeneous; heterarchical and transient; socially accountable and reflexive, including*

> *a wider and more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners, collaborating on problems defined in specific and localised context* (Lee et al., 2000, p. 124).

They contrast this kind of learning with the more culturally centred, Mode 1 knowledge in which

> *problems (are) set and solved in context governed by academic interests of specific communities (characterised as) disciplinary; homogeneous; hierarchical and form preserving; accountable to discipline-based notions of methodologically 'sound' research practice* (Lee et al., 2000, p. 124).

Like Lee et al., our concern is to construct a 'hybrid curriculum' for the Teaching Project unit, 'a three-way model, where the university, the candidate's profession and the particular work-site of the research meet in specific and local ways, in the (situation) of a specific organisation' (Lee et al., 2000, p. 127). This always occurs within a broader context (political, economic, social and historical environment). The model draws attention to the interaction of (1) the rigour of the university which we invoke by the use of the rigorous Kemmis & McTaggart (1988, 2000) model of action research, (2) the importance of competence and ethical collaboration in the profession through a thorough review of competencies and teacher mentoring, and (3) the complexity of teachers' work situations with their time, place, people and funding realities, including those of the rural and remote school situations. Although university knowledge is accessed at times, professional advice in the internship is seen as crucial for students' professional development.

To delay the students' decisions about the specific question to begin action research cycles until they are on site is consistent with the Lee et al. model. This is because knowledge of the workplace realities is essential. Also their professional colleague can have an impact by providing support and advice about what might be useful to address. The action research in the Teaching Project is thus informed by profession, workplace and university-type knowledges or, at least, will ideally be so.

Gearing up for the full cohort

The early work gave us confidence and a conceptual framework. However, the three pilots were with groups of students less than ten in number and students who were, on the whole, academically able, 'accelerated' students. In 2001, we are aware that this cohort (approximately 80 in number) has in the past not always shown great dedication to tasks set, especially in preparatory reading for workshops. A related concern was the lack of collegiality they had sometimes shown during the previous three years in our BEd program. The essential problem was how to engage the students, professionally and academically. We also anticipated that the on-coming internship would focus students to the realities of the workplaces that they would soon face.

For these and a number of other reasons, we saw online communication as potentially useful as the university's key support medium for interns at distant workplaces. Furthermore, research by Cooney (1998) with high school students indicated that online interaction could be more effective than the traditional face-to-face encounters for engagement of students. This was an important piece of work because of our concern about the lack of rigour of some students' prior on-campus work. The reflective nature of the act of writing, together with the students' desire to post pieces that could not be 'shot down' by peers appeared to us to be worth trying. Others also note that well scaffolded online support can be effective for students' learning (e.g., Grosser 2000; Hendry 2000; Oliver 2000).

The present research

There are two objectives for the remainder of the paper. Here we report upon the

- online learning support from one pilot group's learning while on their internship (the Internship Project); and
- early results from our action research project on online learning of neophyte teachers as internal students prior to their internship (the Campus Project).

The Internship Project

First it is necessary to set the scene. In the first semester of 2001, there were six students undertaking their internship, the last of three small pilot groups to do so. They had completed the on-campus work of the Teaching Project the previous semester. These interns were connected to one another, and to the unit co-ordinator, via an online bulletin board. Thus this group provided an initial opportunity to explore the extent and ways in which online support has assisted them as they have undertaken their action research. The data here are the students' postings that result from two main sources: (1) structured questions relating to particular features of the action research, and (2) their own postings including questions, and responses to these questions. The postings here were voluntary in the sense that they were not assessed. Discourse analysis of the 75 postings over ten weeks from scaffolded questions and student initiated postings resulted in an interesting picture of off-campus support using this medium during the students' internship. The discourse analysis was supported by NUD*IST (Version 4, QSR, 1997) by the development of a coding tree containing 52 nodes. In what follows we discuss the broad statistics of the postings and the nature of the postings.

Use of the bulletin board varied greatly. There were approximately 1 200 lines of online postings of which almost 40% were by the unit co-ordinator and about 25% by one intern. One student did not make any posting at all and the other four students used the bulletin board to about the same extent, i.e., between 5-12% each. These data are revealing. Two people dominated, although it is not surprising that the unit co-ordinator did so. Further, a little over one half of the postings concerned (a) the action research directly, about one sixth were lines associated with (b) critical friendships and about one third concerned (c) 'other' postings. Thus in broad terms, more than two thirds of the postings were related to the support of the completion of the Teaching Project. We consider each of these three groupings in turn below, focussing on major findings due to space restrictions.

a. Action research

There was quite a lot of thinking to be done by the interns before their planning of the action research. Apart from the focus by the interns upon the classroom (at the expense of the school context), the major point of interest for us as teachers was concern about the several relationships between situational analysis, reconnaissance, the thematic concern (arena of study) and the research question. For example, the relationship between reconnaissance (the profession) and situational analysis (the workplace) was reasonably well articulated in creating a thematic concern. Intern E illustrates this: *even though it would have been good to have the 4/5/6 class I think that I will benefit when it comes to writing my assignment because I had issues from my prac with Kinder last year that I would have liked to address so now that opportunity has arisen.*

Much more problematic was the creation of an action research question from the thematic concern. Intern B was the most extreme regarding this issue and posted, about week 5: *I have changed my mind so many times concerning my research. At first I had absolutely no ideas. I was panicking and felt like I had a million things happening at once.* Others had problems narrowing the thematic concern to a specific question. Intern C: *So possibly I will look at behaviour management for my AR ..., or possibly catering for individual needs.* Intern D responded: *you have an interesting class to work with ... You mentioned Behaviour Management as a possible focus for your AR* (action research) ... *it is such a broad concern ... have you thought of a specific aspect of BM yet? I suppose you need to ask management of what? (Can it be changed?)* The unit co-ordinator also responded: *Seems to me that you have identified the thematic concern (student management in a composite class). What you need to do now is to get this focussed. What is the specific question that you are going to research? Make it an important one so that the effort is not wasted.* As well, Intern D identified her question but was still uncertain. *"How can I influence the frequency of interruptions occurring from students who have been set other tasks to work on while I work with a guided reading group in a year 3/4 classroom?" I still feel this question is a bit 'fuzzy' - probably more in the sense of the language I have used rather than the actual idea.* Definition of the action research question that mattered, and was at the same time manageable, emerged as an important issue for the teaching team.

The definition of the research question appeared crucial in another way. Consider the comment from Intern A that is illustrative of a problem of about half of the interns. Intern A's question was: *"How can I improve students' involvement/participation/ understanding during explicit teaching of new text type concepts so as to enhance/improve the finished published piece of English literature?"* He went on: *My problem is that whenever students are involved in non-structured activities - they are off the air, and because of this the students very rarely are exposed to activities such as brainstorming and think/pair/share activities. Another problem has been editing* *and as a consequence I have decided to make editing a compulsory English activity every morning.* The unit co-ordinator replied: *My first response is that you are perhaps too wide in your question and that data on this would most likely correspond to a situational analysis/reconnaissance-type of data. Having said that you could use data. gathered on this question to inform the next round/cycle of AR. ... In AR be sure of the question and make it important so that the data are addressed to that question to make it worth your while.*

At issue here is the relationship between the data gathered as part of situational analysis and an action research cycle(s). This is again illustrated by the following response to Intern B's *question regarding the data about ... attending behaviour being part of a cycle or part of the situational analysis/reconnaissance was part of my post to (Intern A) earlier today. The answer revolves around what you were intending when you gathered that data. Was it part of a more general data gathering exercise, or was it gathered in response to a specific question asked and, actions planned, etc? If the latter then it is part of an AR cycle.* The flexibility of action research can be seen here to cause some difficulties. In the interns' terms the issue that they are trying to come to terms with as they navigate their internship work is: How do I distinguish between situational analysis and an action research cycle? This is also an issue that the teaching team will need to address and may require more than identifying the research question as the key signpost.

The issue is one of the relationship between the complexities of the workplace and the demands of the profession. But an allied concern, as identified by the data from these six interns, was the apparent lack of consideration of literature (Academe). Only three of the students mentioned the issue of connecting to their work to the research traditions found in the literature though half reported seeking advice from their teaching colleague.

All these issues gain greater currency when it is recalled that the interns' action research is developed into a report that constituted two thirds of the final assessment (for this cohort but not for the Campus Project cohort). Interns also asked about the place of appendices, the appropriate use of tense and a number of questions about the use of the key features of action research in the report itself. What appeared to be at issue in this latter case was the extent to which (a) the action research cycles could be separated from the action going on in the classroom and (b) the elements of the cycle could be separated from one another. Even though this last point had been addressed in class (separation is an heuristic device and inter-relationships clearly exist) there was uncertainty in some students' minds as they came to the actual task of writing. Intern E put her finger on this issue thus: *we just wanted to double check that the AR design... was where (we) summarised our plan, using the steps Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect ... Lastly how many cycles does everyone else plan to do? I presume that similar questions will appear on the WebCT because when you begin to write the assignments we either never asked the questions or have forgotten the answers.* There is nothing like doing to clarify key points!

b. Critical friends

The action research literature is very clear about the importance of support provided by critical friends in successfully in successfully undertaking an action research project (e.g., Elliott, 1991; Kemmis McTaggart, 2000 & Stringer, 1999). About one sixth of postings was devoted to this issue. Interns identified their teacher colleagues as supportive in three out of five cases but the online postings indicated that the interns themselves, and the unit co-ordinator, also acted as critical friends. This issue had been raised in the first semester classes but no activities had been specifically undertaken to develop the skills required (unlike in the Campus Project where this had been anticipated as a necessary component). Approximately two thirds of postings identified as illustrative of critical friend-type responses were attributed to the interns while one third were posted by the unit co-ordinator. Responses of this kind were person oriented, e.g., *Hang in there (Intern E) I'm sure that you are doing the best job that you can and that your efforts are appreciated. The stress is getting to me too, and my class is quite small* (Intern C), or task oriented, eg, *I hope to start writing more about AR on WebCT, as I am finding that when I write I start to piece everything together.... maybe we need to talk more often through WebCT so our brain energy is shared...*(Intern D). There was little evidence of the critical analysis associated with the notion of "critical friend", however. This last quotation illustrates the potential of bulletin board postings, ie, learning by writing. Furthermore, such text can be used in the final report! The lecturers associated with this unit have some thinking to do here.

c. Other

Other postings constituted about one third of all postings, of which the majority were unit administration (40% of this set), socialising (38%) and technical and other problems (15%). The unit co-ordinator posted scaffolding questions and generally used the bulletin board to retain contact with interns on issues such as their need to be sure about Teaching Project deadlines. Social interaction was not at all discouraged. Much of this concerned the usual interactions of friends/colleagues as well as sorting out the final requirements of their degree. Technical problems were few but other major problems identified were finding time to complete the action research of the Teaching Project within the internship. On this issue Inter D put it best: *Teaching is certainly a delicate balancing act. ... I have spent a lot of time program(ming), marking etc and wonder where I will find the time to tie up the Action Research side of things. This is not for the faint hearted! ... a true test for stamina ... which is probably an essential attribute one must have in this profession.*

Conclusions to the Internship Project

We are encouraged to continue the use of online support for students' action research projects while they are on their ten week internship though we note the great variation in the interns' use of the bulletin boards. This pilot has, in addition, highlighted some concerns related to action research and the interns' professional development, ie, the interaction between the workplace, the profession and academe. Chief amongst these is the centrality of the definition of the specific action research question(s) and its relationship to the thematic concern. Related to this is the issue of the students' apparent difficulty in distinguishing between situational analysis and cycles of action research. It was gratifying to see that there was an understanding, at least amongst these six interns, of the relationship between their situational analysis and reconnaissance. More work is needed to develop critical thinking/relating skills yet at the same time maintaining the friendship dimension of the interns' responses to one another.

The Campus Project

During this same semester, the first cohort of 80 students have been enrolled in the Teaching Project. For them the online work is undertaken on campus and directed to their learning. The main intention of the online work with this cohort at this stage is to build the quality and quantity of students' reading in the unit. Some key features of this online learning are that the students:

- read pre-specified text or resource materials and submit online a critical analysis of the readings using a set scaffolding question provided each week on the bulletin board. They respond to each others' critical analyses online using a web buddy system. A significant weighting for these postings has been included in student assessment to cover online work. All postings must be made prior to a specified time each week. Students contribute satisfactorily to nine out of nine of the weekly online communications or else submit a 1000 word analytical summary of the readings for the week missed; and
- have satisfactory attendance (defined as seven out of nine) at weekly workshops designed to maximise students' opportunity to address the concepts and relationships between concepts introduced in the readings. Workshops take an activity-based approach and build upon the prior online learning. Critical reflection is used in workshops but it is also evident in a 'virtual' form online.

In summary, the learning process, as we have structured it, operates in a sequence of students 1) reading, 2) reflecting in writing and posting this on line, 3) reading other students' reflections, 4) responding to the reflective comments of a web buddy, and 5) meeting as a workshop group to review the readings and the meanings that have been made from them in relation to the students' own growth as reflective practitioners.

These points contrast with the experiences of these students in online work in the semester before. Here an un-scaffolded forum and large numbers in the forum had militated against quality interactions so that there were clear negative feelings associated with online work for some students prior to commencing this unit.

As part of our own action research we are re-visiting established ideas of writing theory (Barnes, 1968; Murray, 1982) exploring the idea that writing enables thinking and reflection, and in some ways might be understood as more conducive to reflection than speaking. We want to see how these understandings about the power of writing to assist thinking can be made use of in the virtual environment to improve both the quality and quantity of learning (cf Cooney, 1998). Thus students' work online is used to process what they have read and to create their own meanings of what they have read. This is achieved by writing and by responding in writing to what others have written. We are thus making use of the asynchronous features of the WebCT software via the Internet to promote critical reflection. Another important objective of the asynchronous online work is for the students to build their skills and confidence in the use of technology so that they are very proficient online by the time they disperse from the campus for their internship.

All students were asked, without coercion, to respond to two items in the last Term 1 classes: '(what were the) benefits of the reading/online posting–workshop process so far:' and '(what are the) ways we could improve the process in Term 2'. 69% of students responded to this invitation, and our analysis of these provides useful support for the value of the online postings for students' own perceptions of their learning. In total, students made 77 comments about the benefits to them of the structure provided in the unit, 44 suggestions for improvement and four comments that did not provide suggestions but raised problems for us as teachers.

In what follows we discuss these responses in three sections: a) student perceptions of benefits accruing to the structure imposed in the unit, b) student suggestions for improving the implementation of this structure, and c) student perceptions of the problems associated with this learning environment. For reasons of space, we discuss only the most common student response categories in each section.

a. Student perceptions of benefits accruing to the structure imposed in the unit

By far the most common comment from students (32 in all) related to the benefits the students saw in being able to access other people's responses to the readings. Comments of this nature were related to the opportunity that the forum provided to *read what our peers think*, *learn from peers*, and *be able to read thoughts and ideas without having to respond*. This last comment was made in conjunction with the point that reading other people's reflections on line allowed the student to *see points you might have missed*. One student noted that s/he also enjoyed *accessing **everyone's** reflections on the readings*. Another wrote: *It makes us not just read the info but look* *at how it affects us and it is interesting to see others views as some people don't ever express themselves to that extent in class.*

The key point in these last two comments is that in any class discussion, not everyone gets a chance to speak. Those who are the most vocal, and who are used to having their opinions heard in class, are repositioned in the online forum as having one turn to speak among many, and their opinions are not necessarily the most useful, or interesting to their peers. As one student wrote: *we often don't see our own views as novel so they otherwise mightn't be shared.* The comment about being *able to read thoughts and ideas without having to respond,* along with others such as *I like to go away and think about things,* and *[it's good to] know whether you're on the right track without embarrassment of looking dumb in class,* we think, suggests that several students, even in their final year of pre-service teacher education, do not feel confident in voicing and defending their opinions in public. We therefore see the practice that is provided for them to do this on the online forum, safely, after checking out the scene, is a valuable learning opportunity for them. We feel that paradoxically this produces a much more inclusive climate than the face-to-face class situation, for while in a class discussion everyone is expected to participate, in the online forum discussion everyone **does** participate.

One of the foundational tenets of educational theory is that people learn by doing. If students do not read and think about the material provided in a unit, or if they think about it only during class time and assignment preparation, there is considerably less opportunity for them to be actively engaging with the ideas and understandings they are being invited to take up. 23 of the 55 students actually commented that the structure of the unit was of benefit to them because they recognised the value to their study of being forced to read and think. Comments such as *the readings are actually done; it keeps me on task and on time;* and *it **makes** you do the readings and reflect* are typical of these. We are not surprised by the high number of comments of this nature. In designing the unit we had worked specifically with the need to ensure that all students had read and considered the compulsory reading prior to workshop discussion. The stringency of our assessment of participation in this regard has been a successful strategy in ensuring that students actually do the work.

The category of responses that were next most frequent in relation to student perceptions of the benefits of the reading/online posting/workshop structure was to do with the value students saw in the content material of the unit, once they actually engaged more fully with it. 10 students made comments related to this, some noting the benefit in *gaining information on different forms of AR*, while others wrote that *the readings are valuable, readings are relevant/helpful/beneficial/interesting.* One student reflected on this that *reading followed by postings means a better focus and higher interest due to the fact that we actually have to do something with the information.* As teachers we are pleased with the meta-cognitive pedagogical thinking evident in comments such as this, and in comments such as *our knowledge of action research is being built on which allows for greater comprehension [as we read more],* and take this as an indicator of success for the process. But the student comments also provide us with several useful suggestions for improving the process and management of their learning.

b. Student suggestions for improving the implementation of this structure

The most common category of suggestion related to streamlining the structures we had set up for bulletin board posting. 12 students made comments about this, and their suggestions were of two types. First were requests for the postings to be more easily retrievable after the deadlines, with suggestions such as: *don't wipe postings at 5pm. What if we haven't read a reply?* and *WebCT could be open for printing straight after 5pm* (7 students). Second, there were several students who suggested that we should *have a compulsory deadline for posting so that responding can be done thoughtfully* (5 students). These comments are clearly both pertinent and practical. The problem of postings being 'wiped' was fixed by the time of these reflections, as this was already apparent to staff as well as students.

Because all responses to one's buddy's reflections had to be posted by the deadline, people whose buddies were late in posting often found that they were rushing to compose a reply in time for the deadline, rather than in a careful and thoughtful manner. We need to find a way to circumvent this problem, and the suggestion to have a *deadline for (initial) posting* is both sensible and obvious, at this point in our research cycle. Whether we set the deadlines ourselves or consistently remind students to set their own deadlines within the pairs might be a matter of negotiation for the planning of our next action cycle, in Term 2.

Four students asked for *allocated computer time* during which their group could have privileged access to the computer labs, and another three requested more teacher intervention: *If we are off track.. we need to be told; I'd like some concrete conclusions drawn in class*, and one wanted *feedback*.. There were 14 individual suggestions were made about improving workshops, either by *increasing discussions in workshops* (1 person), relating discussion either more *to the readings* (1), or *less to the readings* (3) and more to *assessment* (1) and the *internship* (3). There were suggestions to have *smaller classes* (1), *another workshop* each week (2), and more *readings, videos and references* (2). Three other individual suggestions were made, with students asking for *more information on the buddy system* (1), decreasing the *number of online postings* (1) and *deleting irrelevant messages* (1). There were also several suggestions (5 students) for a change to the scaffolding questions for the reflection each week. Requests that there be *not just one*, that we have *more variety*, and that the questions should be *optional*, suggest that this is another area we can profitably focus on for our next action step.

c. Students' perceptions of the problems associated with this learning environment

Finally, there were four comments that relate to the unit as a learning environment:

- *some readings are difficult*;
- *how can we stop everyone saying the same thing? Reading the same thing, in some cases, 15 times!*;
- *replies are limited by what your buddy writes. Some entries are hard to reply to*; and
- *one person in our threesome has made one posting and I am not available to WebCT on Mondays.*

Reading these comments reminds us of the range of concerns that students bring to the learning environment, and which we need to deal with. Yes, some readings are difficult to comment on 'on your own', and some people do seem to say the same sorts of things in response to them. And when your buddy writes the same as everyone else, it is difficult to reply with originality and enthusiasm, and when you cannot access a computer on the day your forum closes, you are reliant on your web buddy to have posted her/his reflection well before this time. Even being in a 'threesome' makes the process just that much more difficult. We know the constraints that operate within the unit, on both the electronic environment and the human environment, and we are keen to continue the action research process in the attempt to accommodate these constraints into successful learning practice for the students.

Conclusions to the Campus Project

The Campus project so far has seemed to us to have achieved some of its key learning goals - to ensure that the students are familiar with the literature on action research, have read a range of action research reports, and are confident in their knowledge of the action research spiral (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) with which they will conceptualise and begin their own action research in their internship schools next semester. Like any action spiral, though, our struggle thus far leaves us ready to take the next steps to improve our situation after reflecting on the evidence we have collected about our progress. While we are pleased that so many students have recognised and reported on the benefits of the program as we also see them, we note with concern the pleas of those few students who are obviously still struggling to claim their own positions as reflective practitioners in their own right.

That three students still see the 'academic' authority of the lecturing team as necessary to authorise their learning is of concern, even if the students' lack of confidence is a marker of their diffidence and desire to do the best they can. These comments indicate far more than a dependence on us to 'give a good mark', in our opinion. They also indicate that, for these students at least, the whole meaning of action research as a tool for the development of professional knowledge and growth is not yet clear. Along with the practical changes that our analysis of the data presented here suggests as necessary for our future action, we also need to take steps to ensure that all the students come to understand, before they commence the internship, that their future learning as professional teachers relies on their action and reflection at the intersection of their workplace, their professional reading and the university. They need to know *If [they] are off track* ... at this point in their career, in relation to their peers and to the reading they are engaging with. We need to ensure that they are helped further towards making this judgement themselves.

Conclusions

The development of the Teaching Project unit, which spans university and workplace sites for learning in the profession, provided an opportunity to show the usefulness of piloting the unit prior to its implementation with a full cohort of students. These pilots assisted us in refining the conceptual base of the unit by incorporating the three-sphere model of 'profession', 'workplace' and 'university', as well as modifying the Kemmis and McTaggart action research model for neophyte teacher use. This modification entailed a distinction being made between reconnaissance (review of teacher competencies) and situational analysis (an analysis of community, school and classroom realities) and combining these to create a research question of the student's choice. We found, however, that within the pilot Internship Project specifying the research questions was one of the most problematic issues.

Our move into online work, on campus and off campus in rural areas, has proved to be of particular benefit to students. The early data vindicate this move in that the on-campus students appreciated being 'forced' to read and for the majority of interns in the support that online opportunities provide. What we are aiming for is a much more effective nexus with the profession, the workplace and academe through this unit and the internship.

To get closer to the effectiveness for which we are aiming; there are some thematic concerns that we need to consider in order to improve our unit. From amongst these will come the next action steps within the basic structures that we have established:

- distinguishing between situational analysis and aspects of an action research cycle;
- connecting the action research to academe (via the literature) as well as to the profession (via collegial advice);
- ways to identify the action research component from within a general thrust to improve workplace professional competence;
- developing critical friendships, especially the capacity to be critical yet retain rapport; and
- achieving students' control of their own learning.

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An innovative flexible program for rural women

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Abstract

Today many universities have somewhere in their advertising the term 'flexibility'. These words are being used to describe on-line learning in most cases. They are no more flexible than the old traditional courses as the semester time frames are still in place for enrolment and completion. The mode of delivery is the only thing that can be regarded in any way flexible, but in this instance flexibility means that the student must provide their own access to the on-line materials. Flexibility does not equate with equity. One of the few courses that is truly flexible is the Women into Science and Technology program (WIST) run by the Central Queensland University. The course was designed specifically for rural women and is a bridging program which gives women the basic skills to allow them to apply for university entry and succeed. Students can enrol at any time of the year and the course is not tied to any semester system. While this does cause some administrative problems the course is eminently suited for women who in the main are still expected to be domestic managers as well, in some cases, as doing outside work whether that is on the farm or in the workplace. The course is also self-paced. The flexibility of this allows women to have time to complete the course whilst juggling their many other responsibilities. They are relieved of the pressure of meeting deadlines which allows them to complete their studies to the best of their ability. This paper will describe the history and the rationale of flexibility underpinning the program: the increasing numbers of women who are entering the course: the support given to these students who are studying externally and the importance of complete flexibility which removes stress and allows for empowerment through education while ensuring equity of opportunity.

The theme for this conference is 'Providing Quality Education and Training for Rural Australians'. One of the key components is 'Flexible Delivery' which is extended to mean 'using innovative strategies and delivery systems for rural Australians'. Universities have risen to meet the challenge of flexible delivery with on-line learning, a system that is no more flexible than the traditional systems. On-line learning is dependant on students being able to afford computers and the technology that will give them access to universities and courses. If a student cannot afford the necessary equipment they are denied access. In this paper I will focus on the accessibility of the rural sector to this technology. The Women into Science and Technology (WIST) program, created specifically to cater for rural women by Central Queensland University, will be presented as a case study of a successful model of a provider of a flexible program.

The embracing of so-called flexibility by universities as on-line learning is basically a cost-saving exercise, which assumes that everyone has access to the technology. While the rhetoric from government initiatives suggests that the whole nation is plugged into a computer, networked, and has access to the internet, this is not the case in regional Queensland. There are numerous black spots throughout the state, which are not connected. For the remote (and not so remote) distance learners, therefore, there are still problems of access.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that even if students do have computers and the necessary technology to enable them to engage in on-line learning, the telephone lines are still not powerful or reliable enough to sustain connection (Wooller & Warner, 1998, p. 342). Although access to the technology appears to be increasing in some regions access in others is still limited. The economic downturn in the rural sector also continues to limit the number of people who can actually afford computers and even if they can, the lines in regional centres are not capable of sustaining constant contact to servers. In Queensland in March 1999 only 44.7% of farms even had a computer and of those only 15.6% have Internet access. While this does show an increase on 36.5% and 9.9% respectively in 1998, there is still need for improvement (http://www.abs.gov.au/a). Other states all show better figures than Queensland Presently, therefore, some 84% of rural households in Queensland are denied access to 'flexible' on-line university programs. While there may be public access in places like libraries and schools many of these systems have not been upgraded and cannot handle the software packages necessary for students to successfully complete courses within the traditional timeframes which are still in place. Furthermore, as Strickland and Jordan (1998, p. 108) suggest just having a computer and internet access does not guarantee that the student will learn to the best of their ability. Limited knowledge of how to use their computer can result in students failing irrespective of their ability to master the concepts and skills of the discipline area they are studying. Strangely enough there is still the perception by some, that just giving the students access will automatically result in success. For example, in a report presented by Clayton, Lynch and Boyle in 1998, it was suggested that a successful student had access to up to date communication technology. So presumably lack of computer access rather than ability was deemed the determinant of mediocre results or failure.

How are the present courses flexible? Does this mean that students have flexibility of enrolment? of course duration? In most cases flexibility, as advocated by universities, is a buzz word used to mean on-line either of management, content or both. Flexibility, then, is usually tied to delivery rather than enrolment or length of course (Wooller & Warner, 1998a). Increasingly universities are moving towards students being responsible for their own registration, enrolment and program management via complex on-line management systems. Again cost-cutting is being concealed under the guise of open access.

As Queensland is the most decentralised state in Australia, it has always been problematic to provide equitable access to goods and services for all Queenslanders. The most disadvantaged group is the rural sector. (Dept Prime Minister & Cabinet, p 1988) Attempts by successive governments to address this were, in the main, as Lesley Warner (1994, p. 116) states "unacceptable in a democratic society…as they were mainly exercises in power". Even more disadvantaged are rural women who according to Dorothy Lucardie (1994. p. 111) "have always faced limited access to educational opportunities" and while there has been some improvement in some of the southern states, in Queensland the situation has not changed all that much

In 1987 at the then University College of Central Queensland (UCCQ), in Rockhampton, a working party was put into operation to examine both the educational needs of rural women and the lack of women entering Science, Engineering and Computing. The UCCQ has since become Central Queensland University (CQU), which is a regional institution that initially serviced the Central Queensland district, an area of some 450 000 sq km, with a very dispersed population of 500 000 people. As a regional and rural area it has been designated a low socio-economic region. It has been a provider of distance education since 1972 with Science courses being the first offered. While CQU continues to service the Central Queensland district the focus has taken on a more global perspective.

Through the Innovative Rural Education and Training Program, a grant was obtained to develop an open flexible distance learning program that would give women a second chance to succeed in tertiary education. The working party employed a coordinator to do a literature search and travel throughout the district to ascertain the educational needs of rural women and devise strategies in order to meet those needs. From those findings the philosophy of the WIST course was developed. Subsequently funded by the higher education equity program HEEP, WIST is now mainstreamed under the banner of CQU. It has been legitimised by the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) as a bridging course.

The result was the Women into Science and Technology (WIST) course. Given the expertise on distance education already available, external study was chosen as an appropriate model for the program. It also has completely open entry, flexible start by dates and is entirely self-paced. The course offers introductory subjects in Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Computing as well as basic Mathematics and English. There are no due dates for submission of assignments or completion and phone tutorials and counselling are part of the package for the very heavily discounted, Austudy funded, QTAC approved course.

The Women into Science and Technology (WIST) was initiated in 1989. This was precipitated by the low percentage of women entering non-traditional fields. The aim of the program was to broaden the access of women into higher education and improve their career opportunities and employment prospects. The specific goals were: firstly to address the anticipated short-fall in Engineering and Technology by encouraging mature age women to consider these fields as career options. Secondly, to provide courses for women whose educational backgrounds included only limited mathematics, computing and science experiences (Warner & Greaney, 1990).

The program was designed to give open access to all women regardless of their background. No pre-requisites or educational standards are required. The subjects have been designed to address any short-falls in educational levels achieved by the participants. Each, as a foundation subject, bridges the gap between where the student is presently at and Grade 12, thus meeting the requirements of entry into most university courses. Age is no barrier. The only determinant is that the applicants have to be female. Although this still holds true the subjects have not been designed to provide additional assistance to women for whom English is a second language.

For the rural woman there are a number of obstacles, which need to be addressed if she wishes to study. The economic downturn in the rural sector has placed a great burden on rural women. Lucardie (1994, p. 112) states: "For a rural woman to return to study she is often required to maintain all her other roles and responsibilities: childrearing, housekeeping, farm work, paid employment, etc". The designers of the course recognized that this was a huge barrier and therefore, the course is fully self paced. Thus there are no deadlines and the women can work at their own pace to complete. This not only causes a number of administrative problems in keeping track of the progress across the academic year and between years but it also acknowledges the many roles women have to take.

As an acknowledgement that few rural women (and women in cities) have control of the financial situation and considering the lack of money that can be devoted to a woman returning to study, the costs of the subjects had to be kept very low. Accordingly fees have been calculated so that they just cover the cost of the production of materials, postage, stationary and marking. The lecturers and tutors are very generous with their time which enables academic support costs to be kept to a minimum.

However, if the students meet the criteria, they can seek government funding to do the course. The program is Austudy funded but once the student enters the program, through one of Centrelink's educational funded schemes, they have to adhere to the conditions of the funding. Single parents coming in through the Jet program receive $30.00 per week on top of their parenting support pension but only for thirteen weeks. In order to be eligible they have to take two subjects. They may choose to do only one subject for which they receive $15.00. If they are seeking Austudy they have to do three subjects in order to get the funding and the timeframe is still thirteen weeks. Both these groups are eligible for $200.00 educational funding from Centrelink. The course then ceases to be self-paced. Any student on a pension will get the subjects free from WIST. This was one of the conditions laid down by DETYA and result in the University receiving money from that source for the course. While it is beneficial for the students who are on pensions to receive this extra financial support it also brings problems for them. If the student does not complete in the required time they may have to refund the money to Centrelink.

The traditional gender roles in regional Queensland are almost set in concrete and were identified as part of the barriers. An examination of later research findings validated this. In a study of a small town in Victoria Ken Dempsey (1994, p. 41) found that: "men used the resources and labour of women for facilitating their paid work, and their leisure and prestige-enhancing activities, without adequate reciprocity". Similar findings were made by Katherine Gibson (1994, p. 63) as the result of research in the Mining towns in Queensland. She states: "the prominence of traditional images of masculine (and feminine) identity constrain even mundane efforts towards women's social independence". From feedback, in 1987-8 the working party and the coordinator had acknowledged that gender was an issue and developed strategies to meet the educational needs of rural women. The outcome provided the rationale for the program. As Warner (1994, p. 120) states:

> *The issues that were identified can be summarised as follows: negative attitudes towards entering non-traditional study and careers, poor study habits and learning skills, impact of traditional roles in terms of returning to study, impact of conservative values, suitability of the program in meeting rural women's needs and problems of learning at a distance.*

At the same time that this work was being done in Central Queensland, Dorsman and Kimberly were undertaking similar research in Victoria. They identified the range of barriers as attitudinal, situational and systemic (Lucardie, 1994, p. 111). In 1996 TAFE in Queensland in their report on *The skill & delivery needs of rural & regionally isolated Queensland women* used Lucardie's barriers. While it is problematic to stereotype rural women as one cohesive group, the TAFE study examined women from different communities. Their research was conducted across four groups: women in mining towns, on isolated properties, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and women from non-english speaking backgrounds (p33-4). There were some differences due to location but there was also consistency in their needs that corresponded to the barriers earlier identified by Lucardie and the working party for WIST. Basically all three studies highlighted similar concerns..

After the issues had been identified, a set of strategies were devised at CQU in order to overcome some of these barriers. It was acknowledged that a small team of enthusiasts could not break down the barriers but rather needed to empower the students so that they could climb over them. One approach was to develop the specific subject entitled *Communication Pathways into University:* the study skills and literacy program designed for the WIST program. Through a series of activities and questions, students are encouraged to develop both academic skills and through a series of exercises, self evaluation and self-esteem. They are shown that they do have skills that can be correlated with those given value by society. This consciousness raising activity in the context of a communications skills package is designed to give women the strength to resist or overcome adversity as well as specific communication skills.

One of the biggest barriers, which needs to be overcome, is that of the perceived belief that women cannot do science, mathematics and computing. Many women are actively dissuaded, through the education system as well as by peers and family, to enter these fields, as they are not seen to present a viable career path for girls and women. According to Lynda Birk (1986, p. 185) for science gender does matter. She states "women generally have rather different skills and experiences than men, skills and experiences that are denied to science". Women use computers frequently yet they do not enrol in computer science courses. There seems to be a perception that women believe they are as capable as males but, as Damarin (1992, p. 365) discusses their response is "we can but I can't".

Textbooks, even today, do not cite women's expertise in the non-traditional areas. In order to make women aware of the hidden contributions in all these areas *Communication Pathways* includes a number of herstories profiling women who have been successful in science. Promotional material also focuses very heavily on women's successes in all fields of science, computing, mathematics and engineering. The coordinator networks extensively across the state with government institutions, schools, libraries and community development officers to ensure that the information about the course is as widely dispersed as possible within the rural sector.

Many of the women entering the program have very low self-esteem and many doubts about their abilities. Through the early study skills modules, they are encouraged to re-assess their abilities, to recognize that the skills that they have acquired in their domestic roles can be equated with the skills needed for academic study. In this section the students are also introduced to lateral thought and can begin to critically examine their own positions within society. They are encouraged to broaden their boundaries and to question, not only their own beliefs about their abilities, but also others.

Rural Queensland is still conservative. For a woman located in these types of communities, returning to study is a challenge which is large. She not only has to conquer her own doubts and insecurities, guilt at moving outside the traditional role of domestic manager but also derogatory remarks from both community and family. As Lucardie (1994, p. 111) states: "Women attempting to study found a lack of encouragement by family and friends, and a lack of community and social support". In order to combat this lack of support students are sent contact lists which supply them with names and phone numbers of other WIST students in their immediate area. They are sent newsletters six times a year to help them to feel a part of the course. The coordinator travels extensively throughout Queensland during the year and runs workshops on essay writing, grammar and study skills and visits the students in their homes. Students are encouraged to contact the WIST coordinator if they have problems of any sort. If the students are close to one of CQU's campuses or Learning Network Queensland centres they are given access to library facilities, computers and support. Telephone tutorials can be arranged if the student is having academic problems.

Distance education is always difficult but for rural women it is a viable alternative to travel and a lack of local facilities such as child care. If finance is a problem than all the student has to do is to contact the coordinator who will then ring her back. The university is then paying for the cost of the call. Most of the women who enter the WIST program are highly motivated and very pro-active. The coordinator actively encourages the students to become independent learners but support is there if needed.

Since 1989 the subjects have been reviewed and amended to meet the changing needs of the students. This year a new computing subject has been introduced. The original computing package has also been upgraded and uses current software. Each of the program providers are very concerned that the student's needs are met. The inclusion of Study Skills in the *Communication Pathways* packages was the result of feedback from the students. As mature aged women they needed to be reminded of these skills.

The swing from teacher oriented learning to student centred learning also causes some problems for these women who came through the traditional school system.

No student, if they submit the work, will fail because they can resubmit the assessed work until it is of the required standard. The WIST course prepares the students for the very structured, still patriarchal university system. It provides them with the tools so that they can succeed in degree courses.

WIST commenced in 1989 with a target of 20 women with 20% of those women going into full time study. In 2000 the 2000th student entered the program. In any one year an average of 30% of these students go on to further study. Some use the course to enter into TAFE, undertake in house training, upgrade basic skills that will enable them to apply for a better job or just for personal development. We have many success stories on our books. At present there are two ex-WIST students undertaking post graduate study in Rockhampton. One is doing a Master's degree in Chemistry, the other in Molecular Biology. These women started WIST in 1996. Both had children and one was a sole parent. When they started WIST, they had doubts about their abilities and neither had any idea that they would go on to further study.

The original goal of the WIST program was to "broaden the range of career options for rural and isolated women by providing an alternative entry path to higher education especially in the Government Priority areas of Science and Engineering". This has not changed but has been extended to include all women who see empowerment through education.

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Connecting the dots in the service constellation of the rural universe: An overview

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Abstract

This inquiry creates a rural context for thinking about comprehensive service integration in rural areas by identifying the facilitators of and barriers to service integration as they have developed in response to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. Many of the features of service integration and factors influencing the way service integration occurs in rural areas are unknown. With the implementation of the PRWORA and the WIA there is a new impetus to evaluate how the rural community is meeting the needs of its job seekers and employers against the backdrop of new legislation intended to provide universal access to comprehensive services through a coordinated information and service delivery system. A survey of 42 rural counties in New York State, two case studies, and seven mini-case studies indicate that rurality influences service integration in relation to the role of the organizations' culture and capacity, soft skill development, and other services to meet the holistic needs of customers, services and service delivery, and strategies for overcoming barriers specific to rural areas. Staff capacity creates an invisible infrastructure that transcends specific initiatives, time, levels of funding, economic well-being, and specific needs of individuals living in rural areas and helps to compensates for the lack of infrastructure found in more highly populated areas. The infrastructure consists of strategies for successfully identifying and responding to change and the needs of job seekers and employers who live and work in rural communities.

Recent legislation in the areas of welfare reform and work force development in the United States require service integration between providers of services including schools, government, and businesses in an effort to create a comprehensive system where all job seekers and employers can gain access to the services they need. Little research has documented the impact of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 on rural areas with respect to building a system where the mission, information, technology, and other resources are integrated across agencies. The intention of the WIA is to colocate services under one roof. A job seeker or employer need only step through one door to receive all of the services they need through this coordinated information and delivery system. The value of service integration is not a new phenomenon as some have recognized the concept of integrated services and the need to coordinate human services for over the last 100 years (Soler & Shauffer, 1990).

A survey of 42 rural counties in New York State located on the east coast of the United States, two case studies, and seven mini-case studies indicate that characteristics of rural places influence service integration in relation to the role of the organization's culture and capacity, soft skill development, and other services to meet the holistic needs of customers, services and service delivery, and strategies for overcoming barriers specific to rural areas more so than any other category of focus.[1] There were ten categories of focus and a total of 65 factors of service integration included in the survey. Respondents were ask to identify the factors as either facilitators of or barriers to service integration in rural areas or both. As demonstrated by Tickamyer's study of rural areas, factors can be both facilitators of and barriers to service integration (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000). High unemployment may cause agencies to compete to place clients in existing jobs or bring agencies together to provide a united front to businesses who tire of the multi-agency approach to job placement and refuse to work with providers. The three most highly ranked facilitators of service integration in rural areas were factors related to rurality, staff characteristics, and needs of clients. The three most highly ranked barriers to service integration in rural areas were factors related to rurality, funding, and needs of clients.

The work of Harvey and Summers, for example, indicates that interagency coordination was more rhetorical than it was real (Harvey & Summers, 2000). Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt (2000) found that none of the agencies in their study had even planned for a seamless system. In an attempt to understand how these factors look in reality, research conducted on-site and through telephone interviews allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the nature of service integration in rural areas as observed in action.

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[1] Response rate of rural counties was 100 percent (N=42). There was a 97.6 percent response rate from key individuals (N=41) and an 87 percent response rate from agencies referred by key individuals. An additional 28 surveys were completed from respondents referred by state-level staff or through other means (N=130). Interviews were conducted with 123 staff, clients, and employers. Findings were verified with key informants.

The most significant finding of the study indicates that place is only relative to the services people need. Colocation of services in rural areas, while creating a 'one-stop' of services, may make services less accessible for people who have to travel longer distances to reach them. Some rural areas with very few resources to distribute throughout the community were required to take the resources they had to colocate at the one-stop. The few services once accessible were no longer accessible. In addition, the reality is that very few services are colocated at the one-stop on a full-time basis, forcing clients to return for prescheduled appointments or travel to another agency. The answer appears to be, as one respondent stated, "The one-stop concept should be an any stop concept for rural communities". One of the most successful practices was to create a one-stop without brick and mortar where services could be transported to clients in outlying areas. The system was required to be more flexible and geographically accommodating than the stationary concept of the one-stop as conceived in the legislation.

The success of integration in the case studies appears to be attributed to staff who are resourceful and committed to doing whatever it takes to serve the client and employer. Staff understand the need to take services to the client while maintaining an accountable, comprehensive system. These systems were informal and appeared to rely on relationships with other agencies established prior to the implementation of the WIA. It also appears that the PRWORA had more of a positive impact on facilitating service integration, whereas the WIA challenged and stressed existing relationships. A rural context for the implementation of the WIA was missing in all but one of the case studies

There are seven primary findings. First, features of rurality such as geographic isolation, high unemployment levels, and lack of access to services due to population disbursement appear to influence the culture and capacity of the organization and frame how staff identify and respond to client needs. Secondly, the influence on the culture of the organization also influences the direction the agency takes to achieve their goals and those of their clients: This includes identifying and overcoming barriers specific to rural areas. Thirdly, service integration in rural areas appears to be the result of agencies which recognize they can better meet client and employer needs by working with other agencies to successfully identify and respond to those needs one at a time. Fourthly, characteristics inherent to rural areas facilitate service integration in agencies where there is a conducive agency culture. Fifthly, staff appear to be the critical element in identifying and responding to client needs and facilitating service integration. Relationships and commitment with other agencies progress as a means to meet client needs: Staff are the invisible infrastructure in rural communities. This invisible infrastructure cuts across initiatives, time, levels of funding, economic well-being, and specific needs of individuals living in rural areas.

Sixthly, there were three primary issues with funding. One, small rural agencies do not always have the staff resources to apply for funding or implement programs. Two, some rural county government agencies are prohibited from hiring staff and, or hiring procedures are complex. Three, some small rural agencies cannot front large sums of money when grant funding is six to twelve months late. The result is lack of access to funding and services and limited capacity despite federal appropriations. Finally, characteristics of service integration in rural areas include: (a) coupling of different group of agencies at different times with subsets of agencies coupled with other agencies; (b) a core group of partnering agencies; (c) a very fluid and informal system; (d) agencies colocating on a temporary basis where customers can access services and then relocated to serve the next population base – a system without walls; (e) a type of 'kinship' network is formed between agencies, businesses, and clients and between clients; and (f) staff dealing effectively with saboteurs and competing outcomes within and across agencies.

There are five primary conclusions drawn from the case studies. First, the good news is the apparent success of the agencies in the study is not solely contingent upon funding. The bad news is that we cannot buy what they have. What they have are common values, outcomes, direction, and customers, and a joint commitment to meet each customer's needs by doing whatever it takes. As one informant stated, it is a ". . .can do attitude". Secondly, the results indicate that it would be beneficial to require agencies to assess where they are culturally and developmentally with respect to legislative mandates and allow them to design their own course and growth instead of mandating a one-size fits all approach to implementing legislation and funding. Monitor and facilitate progress within and across agencies. Thirdly, address the culture of the organization and staff characteristics and successful services and outcomes will result. Fourthly, provide resources to agencies to help them make the systemic change necessary to maximize scarce resources in rural areas and reality adapt to changes in legislation through improving the culture of the organization. Finally, fund agencies which document their level of service integration with more than 'rhetoric'.

This research indicates the need to more fully explore three areas. First, little is known of the strategies that have led to the success of PRWORA and the WIA in rural areas. Such success could be attributed to the result of overcoming barriers inherent in rural areas and how needs are successfully identified and responded to. We need to know more about the rural context. Fletcher and Kusserow call for the need to recognize the influence of context on service integration and this inquiry helps formulate the need and basis for such a study (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, & Litt, 2000; Kusserow, 1991). Secondly, merely measuring caseload size, earnings, and unemployment rates does not recognize the means to the ends of welfare reform and the implementation of workforce development systems in rural areas. Invest in studying the means and fostering systemic change. Finally, explore the permutations between culture and staff, shared goals and direction, and customer needs within this rural context.

For further information on this study and a description of successful practices contact Dr. April M. Bender, Partnerships for Quality, 45 Cameron Drive, Potsdam, New York, 13676, United States of America or through email at Ambender41@aol.com

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Learning adventures in the Gascoyne - A journey in motivating and engaging indigenous children

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Abstract

A learning difficulties team is operating in the five Schools of the Air in Western Australia. Each school has a Support Officer / Learning Difficulties who provides support to the school community for students at educational risk. The team is investigating ways of providing innovative strategies and flexible delivery systems for students at educational risk.

The purpose of the presentation will be to describe the processes used within the Schools of the Air to achieve improved outcomes for students at educational risk. Using the principals of inclusivity and the collaborative problem solving process, Support Officers / Learning Difficulties have been involved in a cyclical model of intervention to improve outcomes for rural and remote students. The presentation will provide case study details of how Schools of the Air staff have created flexible delivery systems for their remote students.

The paper will explore the following:

- The process used in determining the need for modifying programs for students at educational risk and the roles of the Support Officer, Principal, Teachers, Home Tutors and Students.
- A case study of Aboriginal students living in a community and the implementation of the modified programs by the SOTA staff and the Aboriginal home tutors.
- The process of identification of gifted and talented students in School of the Air.

Outcomes from this presentation will include:

1. Awareness of the service provided to students at educational risk in remote areas through the Support Officers / Learning Difficulties.
2. Greater understanding of the ways educational outcomes can be improved for rural and remote students.
3. Establishment of an electronic network for collecting and discussing effective strategies for the improvement of outcomes for rural and remote students at educational risk.

Learning Adventures in the Gascoyne-A Journey in Motivating and Engaging Indigenous Children.

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Gascoyne Junction

- Town
  - 175km east
  - Employment
  - population

- School
  - Off site centre for CSOTA for 9 yrs.
  - Full time assistant since 1999

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Why Change the Curriculum?

Create interest and engagement in the curriculum

- Home Tutors involved in the curriculum.
- Cater for individuals working well below chronological age.
- Create hands on materials that are relevant.
- Give HT and students ownership of their schoolwork by being involved in the production.
- Whole family involvement.

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Process of change

- Collaborative decision at CSOTA

- Discuss with Home Tutors the idea of changing curriculum.

- Brainstorm ideas.

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Language Experience

- Choose a topic.
- Record information using digital camera and video.

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Process of Preparing Curriculum

- Use photos to make reading books.
- Use photos to make information books.
- Prepare activities using photos and First Steps Strategies.

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Additional Materials

- PM readers/Rewrite Set Material
- Activity Day—Art/Craft, Pottery
- Maths

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Conclusion

- Children engaged in learning.
- Increased interaction on personal level.
- Improved skills.
- Work completed.

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Using a collaborative model to improve outcomes for students at educational risk in Port Hedland School of the Air

Stephanie Gadeke
(Port Hedland School of the Air)

Abstract

A learning difficulties team is operating in the five Schools of the Air in Western Australia. Each school has a Support Officer / Learning Difficulties who provides support to the school community for students at educational risk. The team is investigating ways of providing innovative strategies and flexible delivery systems for students at educational risk.

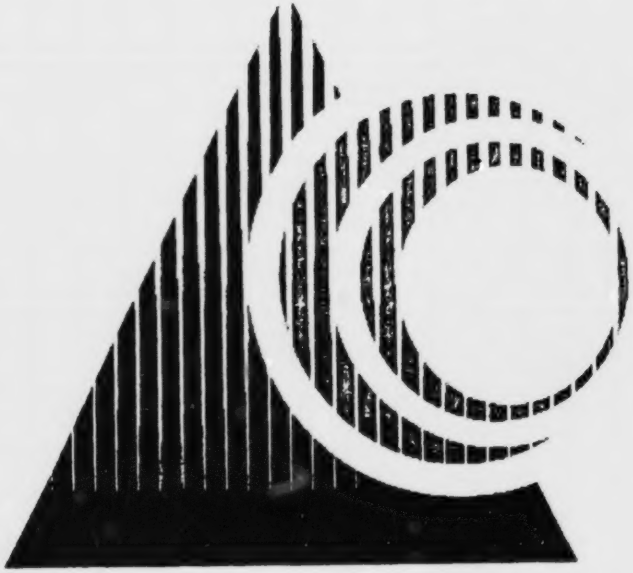
The purpose of the presentation will be to describe the processes used within the School of the Air to achieve improved outcomes for students at educational risk. Using the principals of inclusivity and the collaborative problem solving process, the Support Officer / Learning Difficulties has been involved in a cyclical model of intervention to improve outcomes for rural and remote students. The presentation will provide case study details of how School of the Air staff members have created flexible delivery systems for their remote students.

The paper will explore the following:

- The case study of a child with a disability and associated learning difficulties. He is being educated at home on a remote station, through School of the Air.
- The process of intervention and the roles of the many stakeholders in his education (Parent, Visiting Teacher, Teacher, Support Officer, Aide)
- The process of identification of students in the School of the Air who may be at educational risk, including talented and gifted.

Outcomes from this presentation will be:

1. Awareness of the service provided to students at educational risk in remote areas through the Support Officers / Learning Difficulties.
2. Greater understanding of the ways educational outcomes can be improved for rural and remote students.
3. Establishment of an electronic network for collecting and discussing effective strategies for the improvement of outcomes for rural and remote students at educational risk.

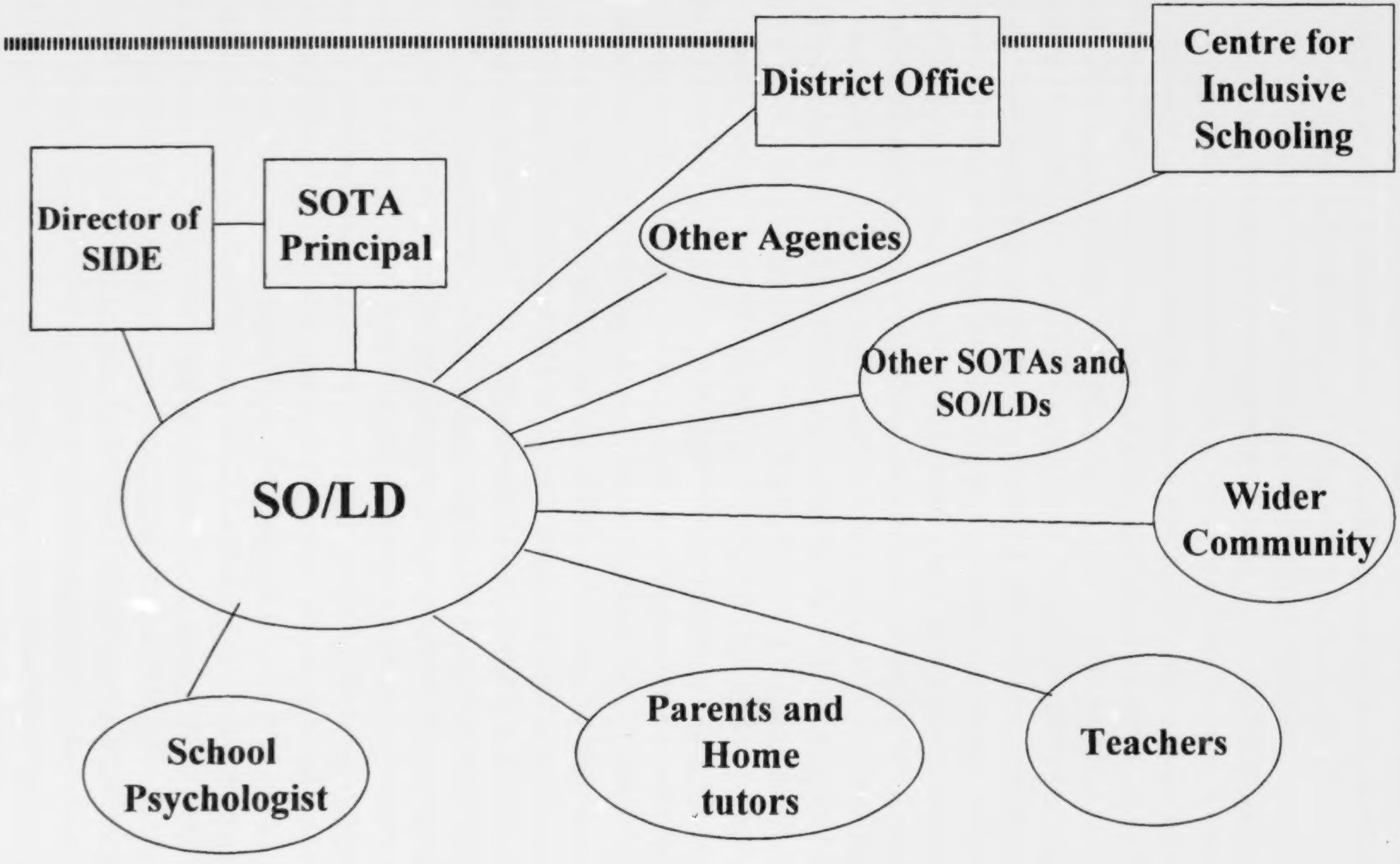


CENTRE *for* INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING

◆

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT *of* WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SUPPORTING STAFF TO ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT



Director of SIDE

SOTA Principal

District Office

Centre for Inclusive Schooling

Other Agencies

Other SOTAs and SO/LDs

SO/LD

Wider Community

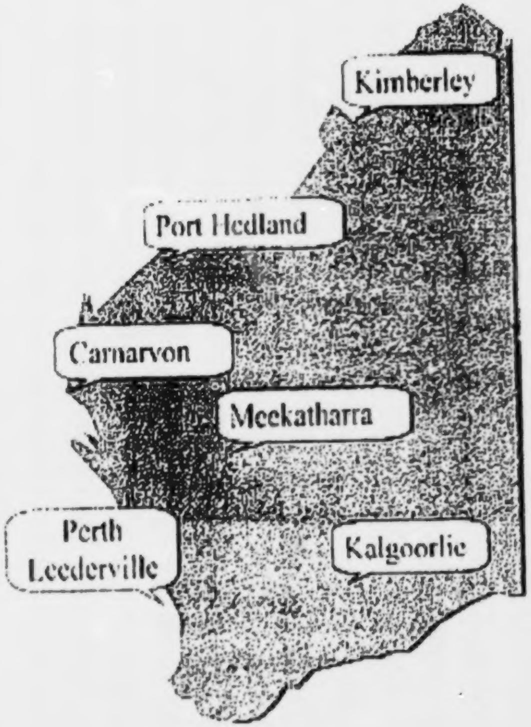
School Psychologist

Parents and Home tutors

Teachers

WA - Schools of the Air

Overview of SOTA Locations


Kimberley
Port Hedland
Carnarvon
Meekatharra
Perth Leederville
Kalgoorlie

Support Officers
for Learning
Difficulties
are currently located
at the Schools of the Air.

21/01/02

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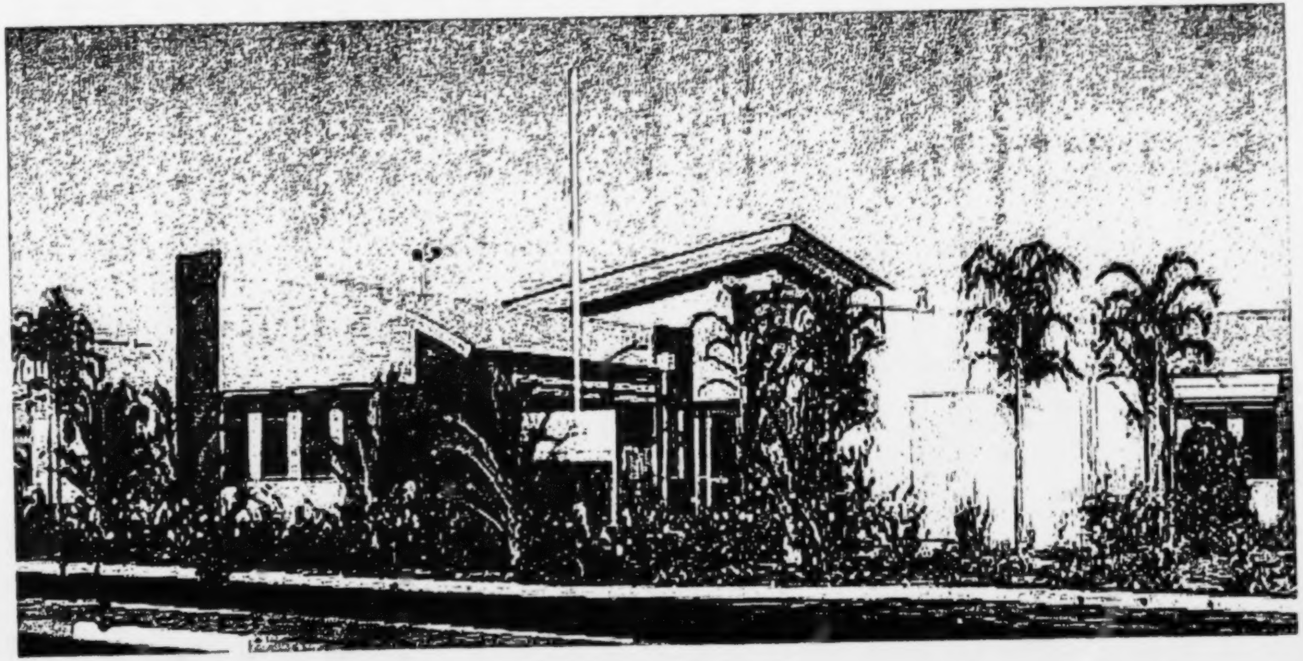
SOTA SOLDS

Port Hedland School of the Air



Using a Collaborative Model to improve outcomes for Students at Educational Risk in Port Hedland School of the Air

What Does a Support Officer for Learning Difficulties Do?

- Works in collaboration with the School of the Air staff, the home tutor and/or parent.
- Works within the guidelines of the Students at Educational Risk Policy document.
- Liaises with SIDE, other SO/LDs, SOTA staff and District Office.
- Assists in the professional development for SOTA staff and home tutors.
- Provides information to the SOTA principal regarding issues and needs of students experiencing difficulties.
- Researches references for teachers and home tutors and recommends the purchase of resources to assist in IEP implementation.

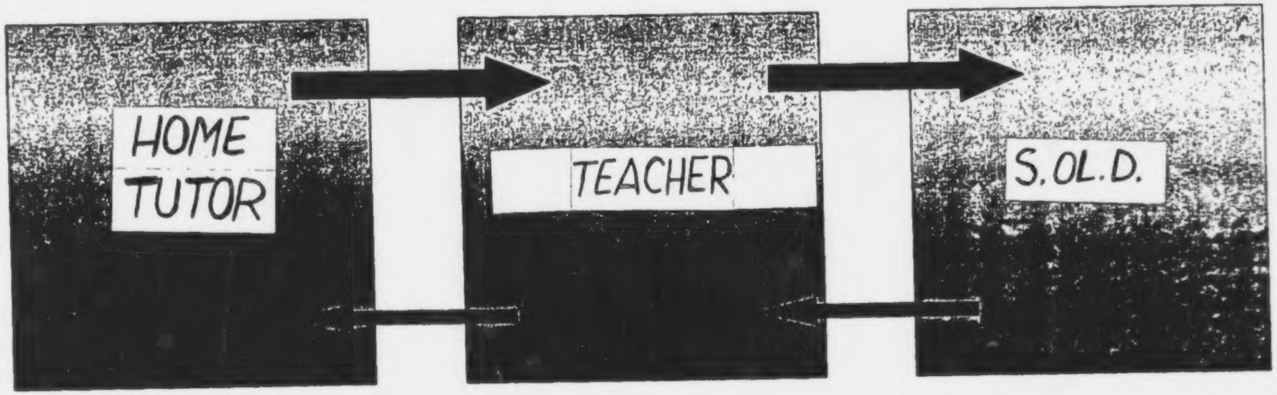
What Does a Support Officer for Learning Difficulties Do?

- **Assists SOTA teachers to ...**

* Identify students experiencing difficulties with learning.
* Select assessment tools suitable for students.
* Modify and adapt programs.
* Devise alternative strategies.
* Develop and implement Individual Education Programs (IEPs)

Contact Process

Students experiencing difficulties with learning


HOME TUTOR
TEACHER
S.OL.D.

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Collaborative Process

- Parent contacts teacher/itinerant
- Teachers/SOLD meeting
- Teachers/SOLD/parent meeting
- Individual Education Plan

Benefits of Collaboration

- Ensures ongoing monitoring
- Inclusive of all stakeholders
- Effective handover for new teachers
- Encourages best teaching practice for the benefit of the student
- Empowers teachers, parents and students

Collaborative Team 2000.

- Lynne Hamilton (teacher)
- Stephanie Gadeke (Support Officer/ Learning Difficulties)
- Pauline Harte (Visiting Teacher – Disabilities)

Matthew’s Team 2001

- Matthew
- Matthew’s mother
- Special needs aide (resident at station)
- Teacher
- Itinerant teacher
- Visiting teacher (disabilities)
- Support Officer

Matthew and Gemma

Matthew in his schoolroom

Structure of Matthew’s Program

- IEP generated through collaboration
- Teacher writes up lessons
- Lessons are despatched to the station
- Teacher aide or parent implements the program

Structure of Matthew’s Program

- Feedback is given to teacher
- Teacher modifies lessons
- Modified program is despatched

Matthew's Lessons

Evaluation Sheets

Identifying Students at Educational Risk

SCHOOL OF THE AIR
WORKING TOGETHER - APART

Process of Identification

Whole School Assessment

ECE Screening

PEAC Testing

Individual Diagnostic Assessment

Interagency Assessment

Whole School Assessment

- WALNA – Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy tests.
- Conducted in August in all W.A. schools for years 3,5 & 7.
- Administered by Home Tutors.

MSE – Monitoring Standards in Education

- Arts
- English – **Reading**, **Writing**, Speaking & Listening, Viewing
- **Health & Physical Education**
- LOTE
- **Mathematics**
- **Science**
- **Society & the Environment**
- Technology and Enterprise (in progress)

Early Childhood Screening

- During transition camp in December.
- Involves pre-primary – year 2.
- Checks basic concepts and skills.
- School nurse screens for hearing, vision, fine motor control.
- Parent/home tutor training is concurrent.

PEAC TESTING

Primary Extension and Challenge

- Involves year four students.
- Administered by SO/LD
- S.P.M. (**Standard Progressive Matrices**)
- TOLA. (**Test of Learning Ability**)
- Sent to district office to analyse and collate.

INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENTS

- Needs basis – referred by teacher.
- Curriculum based or standardised
- Forms part of the IEP
- Results discussed with teacher and parents in a collaborative model.

INTERAGENCY

- School Psychologist
- School Nurse
- Speech Pathologist
- Visiting Teacher/Disabilities
- Other agencies

The end

Online teaching and resources: The New HSC Online Project 2001

Lyn Gorman
(Charles Sturt University)

Abstract

The NSW HSC Online Project (a joint venture of Charles Sturt University and the NSW Department of Education and Training) began in 1996. Designed to provide online resources for students – and their teachers – studying for the Higher School Certificate, one of its aims was to make quality assured resources easily accessible to rural and regional users. The project over its first four years was very successful. With the introduction of new HSC syllabuses in 2001, a second phase began, an entirely new website was developed, and large-scale content development has been undertaken. The new website was officially launched in April 2001. This presentation will include a demonstration of selected features of the new website. The main points for consideration will be:

- the value of such internet-delivered resources for upper secondary students and teachers;
- new features available from such 'second-generation' websites;
- the resource implications of extensive, collaborative online resource development ventures;
- the value of this particular resource for rural educators.

Introduction

Despite the bursting of the dot.com bubble and consequent 'tech-wrecks', there remains a high level of interest in online teaching and learning. An online university is an element of Labor Party education policy; and many Australian universities are already involved in online course delivery. Some are members of international consortia such as Universitas 21-Thomson Learning (a network of universities in a number of countries developing global e-education). At Charles Sturt University (CSU) we are already involved in what I shall refer to as a 'second-generation' website for online teaching and learning, the product of the NSW HSC Online Project that began in 1996 as a collaborative venture of the University and the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and Training (DET).

Designed to provide online resources for students – and their teachers – studying for the Higher School Certificate, one of the aims of NSW HSC Online was to make quality assured resources easily accessible to rural and regional users. The project over its first four years was very successful. With the introduction of new HSC syllabuses in 2001, a second phase began, an entirely new website was developed, and large-scale content development was undertaken. The new website was officially launched in April 2001.

This presentation includes a demonstration of selected features of the new website (http://hsc.csu.edu.au).

Points to be considered include:

- the use of such Internet-delivered resources by upper secondary students and teachers;
- new features available from such 'second-generation' websites;
- the resource implications of extensive, collaborative online resource development ventures;
- the main challenges in the second phase of the project; and
- the value of this particular resource for rural educators.

Brief history of the NSW HSC Online project

The concept of a website to support teachers and students preparing for the NSW Higher School Certificate (HSC) was developed within CSU and endorsed by the NSW Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Aquilina, in 1996. 'Major players' with an interest in the HSC (the NSW Board of Studies, the Joint Council of NSW Professional Teachers' Associations) became involved in collaborative support, and in July 1996 the project became a joint venture of the University and the NSW Department of School Education (subsequently renamed the Department of Education and Training).

The aims of the project were closely linked with the mission of CSU in its own geographical region, including:

- support for all students studying for the NSW HSC and, in so doing, enhance particularly the prospects of students in rural areas; and
- support for teachers preparing students for the NSW HSC, particularly those teachers working in rural schools.

When the project began in the mid-1990s, other aims included communication possibilities that have now largely been catered to by developments in telecommunications, computer provision in schools and public take-up of Internet access (e.g., the project included assistance to schools in establishing communications via the Web).

Work proceeded during 1996 and 1997 with project management structures being established, technical work on website design and development occurring, and teams preparing materials for the various HSC subjects. The project site was placed 'live' on the Internet in March 1997, and it was officially launched by Minister Aquilina in July that year.

The website included not only information relevant to HSC subjects but also hints on study methods and examination techniques, materials on the use of technology in teaching and learning, links to Australian school home pages and to teachers' professional association home pages, and information on careers and post-school options.

The early years of the project presented challenges. By 1998, for example, in spite of considerable effort to promote it via the media and professional networks, the site was still comparatively little used. Students seemed to be relying on their teachers to direct them to use the Internet for learning purposes, and teachers seemed relatively slow to integrate use of the website into their teaching practice. It also proved quite difficult to convince teachers to contribute materials to the project. Teachers' reactions were not unexpected given the relative lack of professional development opportunities in the use of online teaching available to them at that time.

Another set of challenges was associated with technology and issues of access and equity. The site was constructed to be accessible to users of low-end machines; and easy access for users in remote and isolated areas has been a priority. However, target groups in rural and remote schools were generally least likely to enjoy easy computer and Internet access either at school or at home. As the project has developed and more sophisticated features such as video and sound been added, project managers have recognised that some users will continue to be limited by narrow bandwidth in what they can easily download from the site.

As development of the website continued, more subjects were added. By mid-1999 there was content for 25 subjects on the site with five more under development. In all cases, published materials were relevant to the syllabuses, and all material was quality assured. This applied to links to other websites around the world, which were checked for relevance and to ensure their appropriateness to student users. The site also provided links to syllabus documents, to past examination papers and to examiners' comments.

Statistics on use indicated considerable growth in 1999. The number of pages delivered per month between mid-1997 and the end of 1999 showed a general upward trend, with peaks occurring prior to the trials and the HSC examinations. A peak was reached in October 1999 with more than 500 000 pages delivered that month.

Collaboration with mainstream media in 1998 and 1999 led to greater traffic to the site. Cooperative arrangements between the partner institutions and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (*SMH*) provided for *SMH* publication, over successive weeks, of study guides on HSC subjects to assist students in their exam preparation. In the hardcopy newspaper version, the study guides contained references to the project, and from the *SMH*'s own website there were direct links to NSW HSC Online. In 2000, in addition to continuing collaboration with the *SMH*, the project reached an agreement with Rural Press, and this led to extensive publicity in rural and regional newspapers to supplement metropolitan coverage.

By 1999/2000 the site provided a substantial resource for students and teachers with materials for some 30 HSC subjects available, as well as the range of other services and links referred to. However, the decision in 1999 to change the NSW HSC and introduce new syllabuses in 2001 meant that the first phase of the project had to come to an end. Because the proposed changes were so substantial, there was debate about future directions for the website: should the original site be modified to take account of changes, or should a new site be developed? It was decided in late 1999 that a completely new website would be developed, with the date for it to 'go live' eventually being set for early 2001.

A significant injection of funds from the Ministry enabled the DET to support Key Learning Area managers and teams to develop content for the new site, and CSU assumed responsibility for the technical work involved in developing a new site. This was to include an entirely new design and incorporate features recommended by users in their responses to project evaluations conducted in 1998 and 1999. Minister Aquilina launched the new site on 2 April 2001 at the Australian Technology Park, Sydney.

The New HSC Online 2001

a. Online resources and their use

This second phase of the project promises once again to provide a substantial bank of resources. By launch date the website had published content for 23 subjects, and development of another 15 is proceeding, including accredited vocational education and training subjects.

An important question now is just how extensively the site will be used. Data from the final year of the first phase of the project are indicative. By 2000 the site was well known and extensively used. It was accessed not only by the original target audiences, rural and regional users, but also by students and teachers in metropolitan schools in NSW, elsewhere in Australia and overseas. For the year as a whole more than 4 800 000 pages were delivered. For the month of October 2000 (close to HSC examination time) more than 1 million pages were delivered. During the exam period itself there were some 80 000 hits per day. In his speech at the launch of the new site in April 2001 the Vice-Chancellor noted that such traffic exceeded use of the most popular youth site in Australia, ABC's Triple J website. Monitoring of site traffic has also revealed quite significant international use (especially from Canada and the United Kingdom), particularly between 11.00pm and 6.00am.

Given these past use statistics, plus the fact that this second phase of the project is catering to users at just the time when they need resources and guidance for the range of new HSC syllabuses, one can be optimistic about these resources finding a large user base. Since the official launch in April the monthly average of pages delivered has been in excess of 300 000 (an average of more than 10 000 pages delivered per day).

In relation to the quality of resources it is important to note that all content is tailored to the syllabuses and is quality assured before electronic publication. Moreover, the skills and experience of classroom teachers and subject specialists have been brought together with those of web designers and experienced technical staff to ensure a quality site that is user-friendly.

b. 'Second-generation' website features

The new website offers a range of novel features that can be considered characteristic of a 'second-generation' educational site. It includes substantial content similar to text-based resources, but presented to facilitate screen-based learning. Experience of online learning environments has shown that it is necessary to present materials in 'visually-friendly' forms, to avoid lengthy 'chunks' of text on-screen, to think about the infinite and non-linear Internet environment rather than the closed and linear format of textbooks.

In addition, this new site incorporates various innovative features such as:

- sound files on language nodes;
- audio/video clips to enhance the learning experience;
- self-assessment tools; and
- virtual learning environments, e.g., a virtual excursion among geography materials on rainforests.

Other new features of the site, to assist teachers and parents, are:

- portfolio-style materials for teachers to use as part of their own professional development, especially designed to develop their skills in teaching in the online environment; and
- resources designed to assist parents in supporting their children through the HSC experience.

c. Resource implications

Having reached this point in the project – and given the current pressure on tertiary institutions to become more involved in e-education – it is apt to look briefly at the resource implications of this project. The project has necessitated a substantial commitment of resources by the institutions involved. Funds from the Ministry enabled the DET to support teams of teachers and academics developing the content for publication for all of the subject syllabuses. CSU's input has included assistance in project management and a technical team within the Division of Information Technology to design the new website, publish all material and facilitate the incorporation of greater levels of interactivity. Substantial management and support structures, and consequent travel and teleconferencing, have been necessary to foster and sustain the large collaborative effort of the two phases of the project. Availability of additional funding and periodic release of teachers from 'normal' teaching duties to work on content development have been indispensable – and should encourage pause for thought if we believe we can undertake substantial e-world ventures in the context of 'normal' activities. (Experience beyond this project indicates that development of a single semester-long university subject for online delivery is likely to cost in the order of $60 000.)

In the volatile Internet environment, the initial inputs, of course, are not sufficient for success. Website maintenance is critical to ensure a fault-free resource that does not suffer from 'link-rot', that provides links to emerging relevant resources, that attracts users through changing topical information and 'current news' on the site, and that maintains currency in relation to examiners' comments and study skills and examination preparation hints. Thus the resourcing of any online teaching and learning site must cover maintenance as well as initial development.

d. Major challenges

In this second phase of the project access remains an issue. Some students and teachers in rural and remote areas may not have easy access to computers. Those in areas not well served by telecommunications infrastructure will experience difficulties regarding reliable Internet service provision and adequate bandwidth. Where services are available but inadequate, downloading materials may be frustratingly or impossibly slow, with the more sophisticated multimedia features of the site being difficult to use.

Nonetheless, Australia is known for generally rapid take-up of new technologies, and Internet use has developed rapidly. The project is based on the assumption that telecommunications provision in rural areas will continue to improve along with increasing computer access in rural and remote schools.

Another challenge is for project teams to fill gaps and have satisfactory content across the entire range of HSC syllabuses. It is not easy to persuade often already 'overstretched' teachers and academics to join content writing teams. The sheer scale of the project makes content preparation an immense task.

Second-generation sites also face greater competition than was the case in the mid-1990s. There have been efforts (not entirely successful) by private web providers such as WorldSchool and Ozseek to offer online tutoring to HSC students and to customise packages according to individuals' subject choices. The great comparative advantages of the NSW HSC Online project are that it is free to users and it enjoys the credibility afforded by the collaborating institutions and the quality assurance procedures.

Finally, there is the general challenge for those involved in a project such as this of keeping up-to-date with what we learn about learning in virtual environments and being able to modify what the website offers to make the best provision for learners' needs. This is linked with the general point about maintenance of any website, but the more fundamental issue is just how much we know about the pedagogical implications of e-learning. While we have had the benefit of feedback from students and teachers in evaluations of the first phase of NSW HSC Online, particularly about presentation of material in the e-environment, we still have much to learn about effective teaching delivery and efficacious learning in an e-world.

e. NSW HSC online as a resource for rural educators

The new HSC Online website illustrates some of the changes in online educational delivery since the mid-1990s. The e-world has been subject to rapid change, and web design features come and go rapidly. The new look of the 2001 site is important, particularly for the main target audience in their late teens who are accustomed to the volatile environment of the Internet. Beyond 'the look', the new site's greater interactivity is also important for a generation of web-savvy users who are comfortable with, and expect opportunities for engagement with, such resources.

In summary, then, what is the value of this resource for rural educators? It is important to note that the site has always been seen as an adjunct to good classroom teaching and a supplement to existing resources; it has never been intended as a replacement for teachers. However, in recognition of the likelihood that rural and remote schools will be less well endowed with resources than many of their metropolitan counterparts, the NSW HSC Online project has always aimed to enhance the prospects of students in rural areas by providing easy access to relevant resources and to make rural teachers' tasks easier by so doing.

In an ever more resource-rich world NSW HSC Online offers:

- easy access to materials specifically written to address syllabus content;
- access to other resources, such as websites, selected and vetted for their relevance to the syllabuses and their appropriateness for use by upper secondary students;
- the credibility deriving from DET and Board of Studies support and involvement;
- assistance for students in developing their study skills and examination techniques;
- guidance for students beyond the HSC experience in the form of advice and resources on careers;
- online-relevant professional development opportunities for teachers; and
- materials for parents to assist them in playing a supportive role for their teenagers through HSC preparation and examination times.

So long as one has computer and Internet access – and this may by via the local library rather than school or home – NSW HSC Online is accessible at any hour of day or night; ...and it is free.

An initial exploration into a time of change: Teacher perceptions of their profession in the new millennium

Tamara Jones
(Charles Sturt University)

Abstract

This paper discusses the perceptions that three Riverina-based secondary schoolteachers have of their profession as told to the researcher during in-depth, individual interviews. This study places the participants within a particular historical context, that is immediately after the May 2000 resolution of the 1999/2000 NSW industrial dispute, and seeks to understand how the dispute impacted upon their professional and personal lives. What emerged from this study, and from interviews with other Riverina-based schoolteachers that have taken place since these participants were originally interviewed, is that the lives and perceptions of these teachers are extremely complex. By initially investigating their perceptions of the impact of the industrial dispute on their professional and personal lives, it became extremely evident that issues and concerns important to teachers are not merely limited to those of an industrial nature.

Themes and concepts that have emerged from this grounded theory study include: the intensification and complexity of profession, perceptions of the influence of economic rationality in education policy as highlighted during the industrial dispute, the role and relevance of unionism in the profession, the importance of intrinsic rewards in teacher retention/attrition, the impact of extrinsic factors (such as negative community perceptions of the profession) on professional and personal satisfaction, perceived status of the profession from within and outside the profession, and the role the media plays in promoting positive and negative portrayals of the profession. By deconstructing the lived realities of these teachers and using their voices to tell their stories, it is intended that we may gain a clearer understanding of what it is like to be a rural secondary school teacher at the dawning of a new millennium.

Introduction

The idea of exploring the professional and personal lives of rural teachers developed during the compilation of my literature review which revealed the apparent existence of great disenchantment and dissatisfaction of teachers in relation to the intensification and declining status of the profession. The absence of a substantial body of literature relating to how teachers think the community perceives them and the impact of these perceptions on their professional and personal lives of teachers also encouraged the investigation of these issues (Blackmore, 1999; Lampert, 2000). This curiosity was further aroused by the researcher's observation of the role the mass media played and its impact on the community's perception of teachers during the 1999-2000 industrial dispute, especially in her rural community. It was then decided that by using the 1999/2000 industrial dispute involving NSW independent and government schoolteachers to place the research in a particular historical context, the perceptions of rural secondary school teachers may be revealed at a critical period in their careers.

Initially, the researcher wanted to investigate the role of unions in this dispute and how the unions served their members during this particular period. However, when the actual interviews took place it became clear that industrial dispute context highlighted the teachers' primary focuses – the intensification and complexity of the profession, the greater levels of accountability and expectations, the perceived declining status and lack of understanding and support of the profession by non-teachers, and the importance of intrinsic rewards in relation to the personal and professional satisfaction of teachers in the absence of extrinsic rewards (such as status within the community or financial rewards) (Ellis, 1984 cited in Latham, 1998). These factors were observed to play a pivotal role in the professional and personal satisfaction of the teachers and have a significant impact on the teachers' self-perception.

The primary objective of the pilot grounded theory study was to *reveal the perceptions held of three different secondary teachers about the 1999/2000 industrial dispute and its key role players and, how this dispute impacted on the professional and personal lives (especially their degree of professional satisfaction and their perceived status within the community).* In order to elucidate each participant's perspective, the task of the researcher was to use semi-structured (an interview schedule was used to provide some key questions that needed to be addressed and was developed during the literature review process), in-depth, hour long interviews to encourage the teachers to 'tell their story' and provide valuable 'insider knowledge' in a way that encouraged reflexivity and gave insight to their lived reality (Lampert, 2000; Loughran, 1996; Wolcott, 1985 cited in Dinham 1997). As a project within the field of 'teachers' voice research', (Acker, 1995), the participants were encouraged to dominate the interview and were not inhibited from deviating from the set questions where appropriate. The interview questions were designed to encourage descriptive responses from the participants, rather than simple yes/no answers. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Metz 2000; Wolcott, 1985 cited in Dinham, 1997).

The focus of the study was originally limited, so as to be able to engage in research that was reasonable in size and complexity, and that could be completed within the time and financial resources available. As such, the three participants who provided the data for this study were selected due to their disparate ages and experience within the educational field. As this small-scale research project sought to illuminate, understand and interpret meaning or nature of the experiences of three individual teachers in great depth, grounded theory methodology allowed the researcher to obtain the intricate details about the feelings, thought processes and emotions of the participants, which may have been difficult to extract or understand through the implementation of more conventional research methods, such as those within the quantitative framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory methodology allows the theory to emerge from the data, and is therefore is more likely to resemble 'reality', offer insight, and enhance understanding of the phenomena being researched (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Principles of grounded theory guided the conceptual coding, comparative analysis and theoretical sampling of the data in order to highlight abstractions and interconnections between the collected data (Loughran, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This analysis ensured that nothing was taken for granted (such as, tone of voice, physical gestures, use of rhetorical questions and sarcasm, or the making of jokes) and that all statements were intently analysed in order to highlight and understand the lived reality of the participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The collection of data was guided by a theoretical orientation based within the post-structuralist approach. That is, the researcher was directed by the need to hear the voices of the teachers and not to ignore their role in the education system, in order to interpret, inform and illuminate the impact of the recent industrial disputation on the professional and private lives of teachers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990 cited in Dinham, 1997).

This project does not seek to provide representativeness or generalisability. Instead it attempts to sensitively and objectively recognise and explain the impact of industrial disputation and its related issues, on the professional and personal lives of three secondary teachers, with a wide spectrum of experience, living and working in a rural area of NSW, by using their true 'voices'.

The perspectives of three members of a 'peculiar profession'

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed several broad themes – the teachers felt somewhat alienated from and misunderstood by the wider community; the teachers clearly conveyed their belief that their profession had intensified while their status had declined; the teachers' experience of the 1999/2000 industrial dispute was quite negative; however, the teachers were overall, quite satisfied with their chosen profession.

The data were then compartively analysed and as the different responses of the participants to particular questions that related to the emergent themes were compared, certain concepts gained clarity. Within these themes, particular concepts emerged, such as: role intensification; alienation; 'deflated footy' feelings (that is feelings of frustration and powerlessness); paradoxical nature of the profession; extrinsic and intrinsic rewards; and professional satisfaction. These concepts were then related to each other, using the voices of the participants to present a picture of how three secondary teachers, living and working within a rural community, experience their profession and its impact on their personal lives during a critical incident of industrial disputation. Their story is explained as follows.

In order to understand how teachers perceive themselves, it is essential, to discover why they chose to enter the teaching profession (Musgrave, 1972). **AB** is a twenty-five year old male with a Bachelor of Social Science (Human Movement and Recreation) and Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary – PD/H/PE) and has been teaching for the past four years in a single sex, non-government high school in a rural area of NSW. He has been PD/H/PE co-ordinator temporarily and wishes to make this a permanent position in the future. AB was motivated to become a teacher because it provided:

> *...the opportunity to hopefully educate some young minds into creating them into better adults.*

CD is a thirty-two year old male with a Bachelor of Education and Diploma of Education and has been teaching for the past thirteen years, in both the government and non-government systems. He has been sportsmaster, PD/H/PE co-ordinator, Year co-ordinator and has recently completed a Master of Education Administration, with a view to entering the administration area of education in the future. CD, unlike the other two participants, and approximately 75% of the 17 teachers who have been interviewed since and reported that teaching was not one of their first career preferences, stated:

> ... *I've wanted to teach from Year Eight onwards. I saw the lifestyle and had some good teachers in Year Eight*...

CD acknowledges that while working with adults in the administration of the school, such as other teachers, the NSW DET and the BOSNSW, and interacting with parents and community members is important, "... *the real focus is working with the kids*", which as will be further discussed is an important intrinsic motivation for teachers.

EF is a sixty-year old male who began teaching in 1960 when he was a member of the Christian Brothers religious order. After leaving the Christian Brothers, EF taught and has been principal in several primary schools in NSW and the ACT. He taught upper primary and was an ESL teacher on Christmas Island in the mid-1970s. He joined the secondary school system in the early 1980s after completing a Graduate Diploma of Education in Religious Education and has remained a secondary school teacher ever since. Most recently, he spent two years being involved in Christian faith development with inner-city adults in a metropolitan area, who were homeless or had psychological disturbances, on a semi-volunteer basis. He has since returned to secondary teaching in a rural city. EF has taught in the government and non-government systems throughout his career. When asked why he decided to become a teacher, EF's reply was surprising, given his long-term experience within the teaching profession, in that he stated:

> ...*I didn't want to become a teacher, so much as I just became a teacher, as it was handed to me ... it was just the way it happened. I would have rather worked on farms and that sort of thing.*

While acknowledging that teaching was not his original choice of professions, EF further explained that the intrinsic rewards of working with children and his colleagues has allowed him to remain motivated despite his perception that the status of teaching has declined throughout his career. He revealed:

> *Through opportunity I fell into teaching and I think what I like most about it, personally, was the personal involvement with people everyday. I like kids, I like their sense of humour, I like their outward-boundedness and I enjoy the staff camaraderie ... Whenever I then maybe have had the opportunity to consider another career, I often think, how would I get on not having any of that? I just find I enjoy the stimulation.*

It is evident that these participants share the common motivation of wanting to work with children in their decision to enter and remain in the profession. As will be further discussed, intrinsic rewards or motivations, such as this, are crucial factors in teacher satisfaction, commitment and retention, as compared with other extrinsic rewards such as salary.

An 'always intense' but 'more demanding' professon - Acknowledgement, acceptance, and resentment of role intensification

Much literature has highlighted that in recent years the role of teachers has intensified with schools having become the "wastebaskets of society" (Halsey, 1980 cited in Hargreaves, 1994, p. 5). Schools have been given the responsibility of solving various social, economic, and environmental problems that the postmodern society is unable (or perhaps unwilling) to address and are held publicly accountable if they fail to meet these responsibilities (Hargreaves, 1994; Hobsbawm, 1995). Analysis of the interviews revealed that the participants acknowledge this role intensification when they were asked to describe their voluntary and essential teaching duties. AB stated that his contractual essential duties included:

> *... being at school from 8.15am until 4.00pm; three meetings per week; six duties a week; lesson plans written in his teaching chronicle available for administrative assessment; and programming/curriculum development...*

Further CD reported that *"...it would not be an exaggeration..."* that he works between forty and fifty-five hours each week, with this number greatly increasing during hectic times on the school calendar such as when end of term reports are due or programming needs to be formalised.

EF believes that the teaching profession has *"always been intense"*, but believes that teaching has now become a profession that:

> *It is a lot more time demanding ...with teaching it is part of your essential duties to be available throughout your lunchtime, which basically means you're working from 8.00am until 4.30pm without a break...*

The responses of the participants convey their continual battle to convince people that their professional day does not begin at 9.00am and finish at 3.00pm. The weariness in their voices and rote-like recitation of their working conditions, clearly announced to the researcher that they had been asked this question before. The recited response conveyed that they always provided the same answer to this question and perhaps did not result in them feeling as though their statement was believed by those outside the profession, as will be further discussed. CD further reinforced this interpretation with his use of "*...would not be an exaggeration...*" in his explanation of his normal working hours. Dinham's (1997) Australian study, as well as his English study (1999), also reported that the teachers interviewed have similar views as EF, in that the workload of teachers has increased enormously in recent years.

The teachers appeared to be resigned to the fact that their occupation is extremely complex and intense, and that many people grossly underestimate what the role of teacher entails. The perceived failure of the broader community to understand what the work of teachers involves, coupled with the greater expectations placed on the teachers through the public accountability processes (such as ELLA testing, HSC and SC results and programming registration) also increases the pressure on teachers to flawlessly perform all that is expected of them. As EF states:

> *... If you don't deal with it [a student's need] then you wear it. If something happens then you wear it – that's what I think people aren't aware of*

This intensification of the teaching profession is especially evident in relation to the expansion of the voluntary duties that teachers are now expected to perform, as well as the expanded essential duties they are required to perform. The completion of these 'voluntary' duties (such as sports and academic coaching, committee membership and meetings) further intensify the work of the teachers, yet must be completed if they are to provide the highest standard education to the students, as well as satisfy the demands of the school, the community and the government (Robertson &

Chadbourne, 1998). This intensity is evident in the statement of AB who stated that some of his voluntary duties included:

> *Numerous excursions [that go outside school hours]...do that about ten times each year plus football excursions plus numerous staff meetings after hours, P and F meetings that are all voluntary, parent information nights, parent/teacher interviews, new parent dinners ... coaching after school ... none of that's in your contract and I don't really have to do that if I don't want to...*

The demands being placed on the teachers' physical, emotional, and intellectual reserves are apparently quite substantial and may be viewed as a form of "ideological regulation" within the school system/structure (Robertson & Chadbourne, 1998, p. 20). The acceptance of the expectation that teachers should perform these voluntary duties as a part of their professional responsibility was evident in the statements of the duties voluntarily fulfilled by all three participants, as well as teachers encountered by the researcher in her casual employment within the secondary school system. According to AB, teachers who do not perform these duties are the targets of "*whinging and bitching*" and may even be coerced into performing these duties so it is more "*fair*" on the teaching staff as a whole.

The industrial context of rural secondary teaching during the 1999/2000 industrial dispute – the impact of economic rationalisation on teachers' professional and personal lives

It is important to understand why the teachers in NSW, including AB and EF, felt the need to engage in industrial action during 1999/2000 dispute. The government and various educational researchers have acknowledged that the work of the teacher had become increasingly multi-faceted and intense. The 1998 Australian Senate Employment, Education and Training Reference Committee (ASEETRC) (1998) report recognised this intensification and acknowledged that many teachers still dedicate themselves to their students and the pursuit of higher standards of innovative educational provision despite:

- government allocation of finances to education having comparatively diminished;

- primarily negative media reports continually directed at highlighting 'alarming' educational issues to the community , such as the perceived decline in literacy standards;
- government ministers continuing to be relatively unsupportive of the work of teachers;
- the curriculum growing increasingly crowded and broader;
- support services for teachers having virtually disappeared; and
- those not 'familiar' with the work of teachers feeling little or no support, appreciation or esteem for those engaged in the education of the nation's youth.

(ASEETRC, 1998)

Further, Hargreaves (1999) believes that economic rationality permeates education policy in our postmodern society. That is, schools are expected to maintain their existence by ensuring they are competitive and highly aware of the necessity to provide education that enhances the students' abilities to participate in a globalised, capitalised and technologically-reliant society. This is supported by Marginson's (1993, p. 56) belief that education is increasingly "seen as a branch of economic policy, rather than a mix of social, economic and cultural policy". The pervasiveness of economic rationality within the 1999/2000 industrial dispute is also evident when one considers that teachers' salaries constitute over two per cent of GDP and five per cent of public outlays. Governments can therefore offload a major item of public sector expenditure by refusing to increase the salaries of the teachers, increase teacher-class size ratio, and not increasing resource provision (Robertson & Chadbourne, 1998).

By agreeing to a proposed increase in teacher salaries, along with suggested increases in government expenditure on educational resources to enhance the working conditions of the teachers, the NSW government would have to significantly increase public sector expenditure in an area that does not always display obvious short-term economic returns to society. Thus, using the perspective of theorists such as Hargreaves (1999), we may view the NSW Labor government's refusal to do this and their desire to attach economic indicators to education policy as economically rational behaviour. NSW teachers such as AB, CD and EF disagree that economic factors should play such a role in education policy and consequently felt the need to engage in industrial action to support their stance as negotiations continued to fail.

Therefore, the underlying premise of this industrial dispute within the field of education was 'economics'. When asked if he believed that economic rationalism was behind the government's push to use productivity to determine pay increase, AB agreed stating:

> *...I think the government were trying to cut costs and push people just a little too hard in that area.*

EF concurred with AB's statement and also provided insight as to how this drive toward economic rationalisation of education would impact on the professional conditions and satisfaction of teachers by stating:

> *... It was more about the conditions rather than the pay ... I think the government's motivation was to try and drag more out of teachers than they previously do – if they understand what teachers do. I don't think they [the government] really understand how education works at all.*

The frustration and powerlessness of the teachers, such as AB and EF, is evident in their perception that the government clearly does not understand their profession and is dealing with education like it is a commodity that can be modified and altered in order to make it more 'economically viable'. Their use of harsh verbs such as "push too hard" and "drag more out" clearly highlight these perceptions. Both EF and AB recognise that their profession has intensified, and during the industrial dispute feared their work would become even more complex and perhaps not even achievable thereby affecting their professional and personal satisfaction. The teachers found it essential that their existing salary and conditions were maintained or preferably enhanced and the government's agreement be rejected.

In order to convey their discontent with the government's perceived desire to "drag more out" of the teachers, both government and non-government school teachers engaged in strike action and the banning of voluntary labour during the 1999/2000 NSW industrial dispute. When their ban on voluntary labour was perceived to be ineffective as negotiations with the government stalled, the teachers began to engage in more serious action by striking and withdrawing all services for periods of up to twenty-four hours. AB stated that like many teachers at his non-government high school:

> *I went on a half-day strike, four one lesson strikes and one full day, twenty-four hour strike. We didn't do any after school meetings, any before school meetings, any KLA meetings, any staff meetings, any parent/teacher interviews, any sporting events outside normal school hours [ban on voluntary labour], we still fulfilled our duty of care duties like morning, recess, lunch and bus duty. This went on for a fair while since last October [1999] until recently [May 2000].*

AB and CD stated that because many of the NSW teachers in both the state and independent systems engaged in rolling strikes of between two lessons and twenty four hours duration, parents and community members became increasingly frustrated by the inconvenience caused by these actions, and consequently, many teachers such as the participants perceived that any sympathy and support the community may have had, rapidly dwindled as the dispute continued. This often occurs when teachers engage in industrial action according to Robertson and Chadbourne (1998). The participants believed that this worked in the favour of the government, as they felt that the unions failed to address this issue through the media. The participants' perception of the role of the unions during the industrial dispute and the ensuing impact on their professional and personal lives clearly warrants further discussion.

'A sense of solidarity' for a disempowered profession? – the importance of union membership during times of industrial disputation

The importance of union membership to the three participants became very clear when analysing the interview transcripts. The Independent Education Union (IEU) and the NSW Teachers' Federation (NSWTF) were key stakeholders in the 1999/2000 industrial dispute, with their media profile being quite high with regular media coverage expanding this profile throughout much of 1999 until May 2000.

According to Preston (1996), teachers have historically found it necessary to form and maintain unions in order to protect, promote and enhance their industrial and professional interests, and to manage more effectively the collective aspects of their professional work. This then reportedly enhances the quality of their work and the satisfaction that may be derived from it. This is important for teachers such as EF who has always been a member of a union and has also been a union representative during his teaching career. He perceives unions as especially important given his time enduring adverse working conditions while teaching on Christmas Island. He cited one of the main reasons for remaining within the teaching profession was his enjoyment of the *"staff camaraderie"* and that being an active member of the IEU, makes him feel like he is working with *"the team"*.

Unions such as the IEU can act to produce an element of solidarity and collegiality among colleagues that is a critical retention factor for teachers, despite many of the negative aspects of the profession and its acknowledged intensification (Billingsley, 1993 cited in Shann, 1998; Little, 1990a). As stated by CD:

> *The professional support is really important, just being surrounded by people each day who go through the same things that I go through. When people are union members they know they are working together and it's* [a sense of professional solidarity] *sort of built in ...I just feel there is still a solidarity between people on the staff that are in the union ... you need that if you are going to be successful."*

CD conveys the importance of professional solidarity and mutual understanding to success, when the profession is so alienated from other societal institutions. This solidarity is reportedly enhanced by union membership, and its influence on the teachers cannot be underestimated, especially in schools such as AB's that has:

> *... one hundred per cent involvement in the IEU...*

The protracted industrial dispute may also be viewed as having affected the professional support CD claims to be so important in an unionised workplace, as teachers were divided into active and inactive union members, separated by their decisions about whether or not to engage in industrial action. While it is important to acknowledge that such a dispute can enhance feelings of solidarity and camaraderie within the profession, the experiences of the participants, as well as others within their immediate professional sphere, is somewhat more divisive. As stated by AB:

> *A couple of teachers were members of the IEU but they didn't strike and didn't believe in striking so no-one ridiculed them, but they were seen to, well everyone sort of talked behind their backs and spoke about them*

> *harshly ... they wanted to get paid because they believed they were pretty happy and they were fairly senior members of our school ...Some of them were a bit whingy and sooky and fought a bit too much and carried on a fair bit, more so the lazier ones...*

Further AB found that the ban on voluntary labour personally had negative implications for him as he was pressured by several teachers to cancel a football game he had organised. He, like many other teachers, experienced much anguish and confusion due to his commitment to and satisfaction in providing the students with a comprehensive 'all-round education' and wanting to convey his collective discontent through withdrawing his voluntary labour, but not at the expense of the students (Robertson & Chadbourne, 1998). AB reported feeling like he had "*...let the kids down...*" by cancelling the game and also felt resentment and anger toward the teachers who pressured him to cancel.

CD further elaborated on how industrial action had a negative impact on staff relations and camaraderie by providing the example of his partner and one of her colleagues who are primary school teachers at a rural school where industrial action was split 50/50, with CD reported that their work environment during the dispute:

> *...really wasn't very comfortable for them.*

This clearly conveys how divisive industrial disputes can be for staff members who have different opinions and reasons for engaging or not engaging in industrial action. Thus, while professionals such as EF cite professional solidarity and empathy as being one of the most beneficial aspects of union membership, the experiences of AB, CD and his partner convey that for them, this element of professional solidarity was often lacking during critical times. It then becomes apparent that the prolongment of the industrial negotiations may have benefited the NSW government as the profession became increasingly divided from within making them easier to 'conquer' during negotiations.

The powerlessness felt by many teachers during the 1999/2000 dispute was evident in their need rely on their unions to represent their industrial and professional needs in negotiations with a government they perceived to be more focused on economics than education. AB affirmed this perspective when he stated:

> *I didn't really have much to do with them* [the IEU] *until this dispute started but I guess they ensure that our wages are kept up with current inflation and our hours are kept within reasonable limits ... they also ensure our conditions are fine and everyone is treated fairly.*

AB's desire for his working conditions and salary to be "*reasonable*", "*fair*" and "*fine*" was echoed by the other participants. Clearly, these teachers believed their stance during the industrial dispute was reasonable and justified, which may have assisted in their ability to remain motivated, despite numerous negative media reports and a perceived lack of support from the general community throughout this period.

With the necessity of a disempowered profession to negotiate through unions (evident by schools such as AB's having 100 per cent union membership), reported division within the profession during critical times such as the dispute, and apparent disagreement between teachers, the government and the community, about the remuneration and working conditions for teachers, it is not surprising that teachers such as those interviewed, believe that the perceived status of the teaching profession has rapidly declined and was highlighted during the dispute.

'Deflated footballs' – An analogy for the teaching profession

Dissatisfaction within the teaching profession is not a new phenomenon, according to Gardner (1991, cited in Gardner, 1998, p. 38) who last decade stated:

> *The voice of the teaching profession at the end of 1996 is cynical, pessimistic and profoundly weary ...A deep sense of impotence ... declining professional status ... and what they perceive as constant 'teacher-bashing' by the Government, the Opposition and the press has destroyed confidence ... Passion has been replaced by a sort of fin de siecle fatalism.*

Heafford and Jennison (1998), as well as Sinclair (1990), found that role intensification, declining provision of resources and working conditions, and diminished status of teachers were crucial factors that generate dissatisfaction, low commitment, low morale and greatly detract from the enjoyment of teaching. These factors, especially relating to the diminishing status of teaching, were mentioned by each of the participants in this particular research project.

Theobald (1998, p. 29) adds to this, with her perception that there has never been a time when most teachers felt that they were being provided with the status and conditions they deserved. She cites the speech of R.H. Budd, Inspector-General of Education speaking before the Higinbotham Royal Commission in 1866, where he stated:

> *Somehow or other the profession of a teacher does not take. It is light work. They work five hours a day, five days a week. Their pay is not at all bad ... but there seems to be something peculiar in the profession of a teacher, so that men will not take to it till there is nothing else left for them to do.*

The views of the participants convey their belief that the stereotyped view of teaching, such as short hours and good salary, has changed little over the last one hundred and thirty-five years (ASEETRC, 1998) as stated by AB:

> *...They just think we have an easy job with kids and it's thirteen, fourteen, fifteen weeks off a year and $60 000 – $70 000 a year...*

EF further supported this statement, adding:

> *"...no-one seems to take it very seriously ..."*

Scott, Cox and Dinham's (1999) English study, reiterates EF's discontent and sense of alienation from those outside the profession, by highlighting that the most dissatisfying factors for English schoolteachers, were related to the community's perception of their profession. Especially frustrating, was the heightened criticism, often played out in the media, as well as community misconceptions about teachers' work, its scope and demands. Consequently, the teachers, such as those interviewed, feel misunderstood, alienated and taken-for-granted. The desire to be accorded with respect and esteemed for their ability to perform a difficult, 'serious' and important role in society is extremely apparent in the voices of the participants.

This is supported in the studies of Dinham (1997) and Boylan & McSwan (1998), wherein many participants felt that the NSWDET was 'not human' in their inability or unwillingness to address the pressures teachers endure and consequently, many teachers felt dehumanised by this negligence. The acknowledgement of the intensification of the profession (ASEETRC, 1998) and the perceived refusal of the government to financially reward the work of the teachers or accord them with a suitable status within society apparently distresses the participants to a great extent.

These factors all contribute to a general feeling of overwork, powerlessness and despondence in many teachers (Boylan & McSwan, 1998). CD communicates his feelings about teaching and being dehumanised by using an extremely vivid simile in his description of how he as a teacher feels at the end of a difficult day when he states:

> *Sometimes you feel like a deflated footy, going back to your office, but every time you save exploding, it's one point you score.*

CD appears to view his ability not to permanently surrender to anger and dissatisfaction as an achievement of which to be proud, akin to leaving the field after winning a game and keeping points accumulating on the score board. Informal discussions with other secondary teachers the researcher encounters during her casual employment in a school in a rural city reiterate the importance of further investigation this issue.

The perceived hesitation of the NSW government to improve the working conditions and salary of teachers was interpreted by the participants and the NSWTF and the IEU, as being an indication of the low status accorded to teachers by the government and the community. The strong feelings felt about this was conveyed be EF stating:

> *I was disappointed with the Labor government which has traditionally supported teachers and schools and hospitals...*

The narrowing gap between the right and left within the Australian political context and the pervasive nature of economic rationalism in education policy formulation and implementation has had a significant impact on the professional conditions and status of teachers in recent years (Apple, 1986 cited in Woods & Jeffrey, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994 cited in Woods & Jeffrey, 1996; Marginson, 1997b). EF believed this to be an important issue during the dispute as he observed:

> *I think they [the unions] were very justified in their drive to lift the status of teachers and I think the climate we are in, which is conservative and concerned with making businesses viable and successful, I think there is still misunderstanding about the status of teachers, or the position of teachers and how much we put in ...*

CD believed that the position of the unions and collective bargaining, was also being undermined and the unions disempowered (Robertson & Chadbourne 1998). This occurred, according to CD, when the government agreed to the agreement proposed by the IEU, but simultaneously refused to ensure the same working conditions and salary conditions for casual teachers and non-teaching school staff, as full-time teachers. Consequently, the members of the IEU voted to refuse the government's agreement that resulted in the further prolonging of the dispute for all members.

Clearly, the participants, as well as other educational researchers, have twinned the issues of industrial disputation relating to working conditions and salaries of teachers, with the status of the teaching profession within the community. The NSW Labor government's refusal to ratify an agreement that would enhance the working conditions of teachers, has been interpreted by those within and associated with the teaching profession, as an acknowledgement and affirmation of the low status accorded to teachers within Australian society.

The ability of the participants to engage in industrial action for a significant duration against such a formidable opponent as the NSW government, while believing they were not supporting by most of the community, may lie in their acceptance of the nature of their profession. They acknowledge that the intense nature of the profession, their perceived lack of status within society and the failure of the government, the NSWDET, school administrators, and many members of the community to understand or appreciate their profession are extremely dissatisfying and disturbing. However, their ability to derive satisfaction from factors intrinsic to teaching allows them to remain committed to and essentially satisfied with teaching.

The participants involved in this particular study do not convey the same cynicism, pessimism and weariness described by Gardner's study (1998). Although they are disappointed with the declining status of the profession and the perceived lack of support of the community, the government, the administration of the schools and the media, and are especially disappointed with the impact industrial disputation had on their professional and personal lives, they still remain committed to the profession deriving much enjoyment from their work. As stated by AB, CD and EF, they are challenged, stimulated and rewarded by working with children.

Alienated and dislocated – a profession misunderstood and misrepresented

The sense of segregation from those not closely associated with the teaching profession has been a clear and constant message communicated by the participants. Dinham (1992 cited in Dinham 1997) revealed that many non-teachers were frequently not aware of the less visible demands of teaching and the pressures and stress these demands can cause both within teachers' professional and personal lives. The intensification of the profession and increased levels of accountability means that many teachers are now finding such demands to be 'unrealistic' (Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Dinham, 1997). As stated by EF:

> *I think there is still misunderstanding about the status of teachers or the position of teachers and how much we put in. There is more to education than just turning up at 9.00am and teaching the classes. We are all aware of that.*

The participants and the profession in general, perceive that the community has perhaps been misinformed about the work of teachers as is conveyed by EF's use of "we", which further highlights the segregation of the profession from the wider community and other professions. This segregation may be self-imposed, given that each participant clearly stated that they do not believe that those outside the profession understand the complex and intense nature of teachers' work, and the participants no longer attempting to explain the nature of their work to non-teachers.

The role of the media in the 'misunderstanding' and alienation of the teaching profession also warrants discussion, given that the 1999/2000 industrial dispute was to a great extent, played out in the mass media. The participants believed that the IEU and NSWTF were unsuccessful in generating public sympathy and support for the teachers, during and immediately after the industrial dispute by not using the media to portray a more positive representation of teachers to the community. The participants felt somewhat underwhelmed by the unions' efforts and appeared to feel further alienated from the community during the period of the dispute.

CD was very clear in his perception of the IEU:

> *I wasn't impressed* [with how the union acted on behalf of the teachers during the dispute] ... *I certainly wasn't as happy with the service we received* [from the IEU]... *I certainly haven't the teachers' position put across clearly, as what it could be.*

According to Robertson and Chadbourne (1998), mobilising a successful campaign is essential in mustering and maintaining public support during industrial disputes. The participants felt the IEU and NSWTF could have effectively promoted their cause by twinning the desired improvements in teachers' salaries and working conditions other quality issues in education (such as enhancement of scarce resources). According to AB:

> *I just think the IEU should have advertised – used the media more to portray teachers as a better person than they actually did, because a lot of people in the community had no idea what was going on and they portrayed us as striking and I guess 'bad people', whereas we're not...*

AB's perception that the community viewed the striking teachers as "bad people", clearly relates how the teachers feel alienated, accorded low status and held in low opinion by the non-teaching community. The view of AB was supported in the ASEETRC (1998) report that recognised that there need to be more attention paid to the positive promotion of the complex and high quality work performed by teachers in order to enhance community understanding of teachers and the education system in general. This would then generate more support and appreciation that is so important to the teachers and their professional satisfaction and commitment. As suggested by AB, moves should be made to encourage the government to advertise and recognise how well teachers are performing despite poor resources, intensification of the profession and various negative social factors, such as lack of community support. AB proposed that the government should:

> *...advertise on TV what a good job teachers do and explain what we received and portrayed the teacher perhaps in the classroom assisting learning instead of all of us in a room voting on a strike ...*

The recognition of the importance of such positive publicity was evident in the television advertising campaign that began in January of 2001 financed by the NSW Teachers' Federation, which sought to promote the work done by teachers in the government system. This was then closely followed by a second positive publicity campaign beginning in March 2001, financed by the NSW government that also sought to highlight the importance of public schooling and the high quality education provided by teachers within the government system. This is extremely interesting given how acrimonious negotiations between these two parties were during the dispute.

Teacher bashing - An occupational hazard

When discussing the role of the IEU and the NSWTF in the 1999/2000 industrial dispute, all of the teachers interviewed commented on the negative portrayal of teachers within the mass media. Their disenchantment with 'teacher bashing' was obvious as the concept was raised quite often and was clearly linked with their perceptions of teacher status, feelings of alienation and personal satisfaction with teaching. Further, Dinham's study (1997) highlighted the important role the media play in reinforcing how the community perceives their teachers. For AB, the media portrayal of teachers during and after the dispute left him feeling frustrated, disappointed and more isolated, as:

> *They really portrayed us as chanting on the streets and voting for strikes and the only time they* [showed us on the television]... *was when we were on strikes ... I guess there was more negative publicity than positive.*

CD's perception was very clear and strongly voiced:

> *I thought it* [the media portrayal] *was abysmal to say the least. I thought it was absolutely disgusting, the way that teachers were made out and how they were made out to be people who wanted more"*

CD then conveyed his belief that the unions' perceived inaction and failure to strategically use the media to positively portray teachers (Robertson & Chadbourne, 1998) has and will have a long-term and negative impact for the teaching profession and the community's perception of teachers when he stated:

> *But I think in the face of the everyday persona, walking down the street, I think irreparable damage has been done because, and probably coming back to the media again, that it was just so one-sided and they just don't understand. The IEU tried to mount a campaign but they weren't overly successful.*

This was supported by AB's belief that due to the unions' failure to positively engage the media during the dispute, the community now had an even less favourable perception of teachers, when he stated:

> *The community, I guess, perceive teachers as, I guess, always being on strike and always bludging and wanting more money. That's all people would say to us in the street 'Oh you're striking, yeah good on you, more money, good on you, more holidays, yeah, that's the go'. Our union didn't actually advertise enough and portray our teachers as fighting for a good cause, not just for themselves"*

According to existing literature, many teachers feel the compulsion to justify or defend one's profession, or at worst, to even feel ashamed of their profession, regardless of whether they are English, Australian or New Zealanders (ASEETRC 1998; Dinham & Scott 1998; Scott, Cox and Dinham 1999). The participants felt this keenly during the industrial dispute, with their frustration and powerlessness evident in the statements of AB and EF:

AB: *...Sometimes I did [have to justify myself as a teacher]. Sometimes I couldn't be bothered and laugh and walk away...*

EF: *Yes I have felt that I had to explain what I actually do as a teacher to combat the stereotypes that some people have of teachers (especially in relation to the holidays, hours and so on) ...*

It is evident that these teachers feel greatly misunderstood and alienated by those outside the teaching profession. The extent of the frustration felt by the teachers is clear as they can so coherently verbalise what they view as the problem, such as EF's statement *"I don't think they [the community] realise, I don't think they can picture it"*, yet they realise they most likely will not be understood by people those who possess stereotypical perceptions of the profession. The effect this has on the self-concept of the teachers should not be underestimated.

During the 1999/2000 dispute the perceived lack of community support and understanding of the disputed issues was conveyed by CD's experience when:

> *I was out to dinner a couple of months ago now, and there were these people talking about the dispute afterwards and obviously didn't know the facts. I got quite irate with them as they were saying 'bloody teachers, bloody this, bloody that'. And I said 'Well do you know the issues?'. And*

> *this bloke who was a loudmouth all through dinner, he certainly didn't know much about it.*

AB was also extremely disappointed and frustrated to be on the receiving end of many negative comments made by people, who like those encountered by CD 'obviously didn't know the facts' and stated:

> *I got a fair bit of bagging through friends and people outside of school saying: 'You bludging teachers, you want more time off and more money'. People saying that all we wanted was more time off and money and they didn't understand that we were going for conditions and our wage increases were just like inflation over the next four years, like similar to what they are earning, if not less than what they get.*

Again, hearing oneself being referred to as a 'bludging teacher' clearly impacts upon the self-concept of the teachers. AB also verbalises the desire of teachers to be perceived like other adult professions, by comparing the desire of the teachers to ensure they are provided with conditions and salary increases 'similar' to those received by the rest of the more highly-esteemed professions. The frustration and disappointment of the participants is abundantly clear when CD stated:

> *...Teaching is not seen as being a status profession. It's not highly esteemed ... Yep, there is definitely a low status accorded to teachers...*

This is then supported by EF, who stated:

> *But they don't recognise the demands, the emotional demands of the classroom. No teacher has a non-emotional day. You just cope. You can go to an office and exist for a day. You can work in a shop and be fairly non-productive for a day and it won't affect anyone. You can't do that in a classroom. You're facing thirty-odd personalities who are demanding of your time. You have to forget where you're at and be there. And I think that's what wears us out and it hurts when other people just don't appreciate it ... you just sit and wonder 'Boy, what do you have to do?*

EF quite openly admits that it hurts to realise that the intense and complex work he performs is unappreciated, underestimated, not even properly understood and extremely stereotyped. Most people who have passed through the education system believe they know what it is like to be a teacher. However, as stated by EF, the other participants and the federal government in its reports, these people do not recognise the demands of teaching are constant and unabating on the emotional, academic, and physical reserves of the teacher. EF verbalises he frustration, confusion and near helplessness that characterises many of the teachers when he wonders "Boy what do you have to do?"

Thus, it is clear that the participants who already felt unappreciated and misunderstood by the general community prior to the 1999/2000 dispute, had this situation exacerbated greatly by the perceived negative media attention and came to feel even more alienated from society than before. With the intensity of the teaching profession acknowledged, the low status accorded to teachers discussed, and the alienation felt by teachers highlighted, it is therefore important that we discuss the paradoxical nature of the contemporary teaching profession.

Low status/high expectations – a professional paradox

This concept began to emerge from the very first interview with AB. As he discussed the intense nature of teachers' work and his perception that the community holds high expectations of education while according teachers with low status, the concept of a professional paradox emerged. This was then further investigated during the following two interviews within this smaller project, and the seventeen other interviews that have been undertaken in the larger PhD project, and has been highlighted as a concept of significance. The impact this paradox has on the professional and personal lives of the teachers interviewed is very substantial, as will be further discussed.

Heafford and Jennison (1998) observed that one of the most important factors relating to teacher retention, is esteem showed to teachers through expressions of praise, confidence and support from parents, students, the community and governments. The observation of Jeffrey and Woods (1996) is supported in the research of Boylan and McSwan (1998), that revealed the major sources of teaching dissatisfaction were non-teaching related issues, such as lack of community support. When asked if they received any positive community feedback during the 1999/2000 industrial dispute AB responded:

> *I'll tell you who did give us some positive feedback were the people who were more well-informed... people who knew teachers and knew what*

exactly was going on. It was usually just ill-informed people that you'd argue with.

Again, the isolation of 'teachers' from 'non-teachers' is revealed, as the participants' perception that the wider community does not understand their profession and was highlighted during the dispute. Further, it appears that this isolation is exacerbated by the participants' perception that this inability to understand is the choice of the community, when stating that people who supported them were "more well-informed" and those who did not were "ill-informed". Thus the isolation and alienation of teachers from the wider community may be interpreted as being **reactionary and cyclical**. That is:

- the teachers do not feel supported, appreciated or understood by the community that they perceive as not being well-informed, either by choice or by lack of interest;
- little publicity or positive media attention is provided which would act to communicate with and inform the community about the nature of the teaching profession;
- the community remains 'ill-informed' about the nature of teaching and continue to perpetuate existing stereotypes of the profession; and
- teachers continue to feel unsupported, unappreciated and misunderstood, and the cycle continues.

Therefore, while those with 'insider knowledge' such as the teachers and the teacher unions continue to remain isolated from the wider community, and not share this knowledge with those outside the profession, existing stereotypes will continue to be perpetuated and teachers will continue to perceive themselves as being alienated from society at large. Clearly, the perceptions of both teachers and the general community need to be modified if the status and esteem of the teaching profession are to be enhanced. This will not occur if the government and the media continue to be more focused on 'teacher bashing' and criticising existing practices, rather than promoting and highlighting existing quality educational practices.

All three of the interviewees in this study conveyed their perception that the community did not understand or appreciate their work. They also highlighted the importance of the relationship between community support and appreciation of the work of teachers, and the professional and personal satisfaction of the teachers. Further investigation of this issue is necessary, so the dynamics of this relationship may be better understood.

Extrinsic vs intrinsic rewards – the relationship between occupational status, professional satisfaction and teacher retention/attrition as highlighted by the 1999/2000 industrial dispute

The impact of critical incidents such as the 1999/2000 dispute, as well teachers' perception of how they are viewed by those outside the profession, and their personal satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teaching, play a large role in professional retention or attrition. Kirby and Grissmer (1993, cited in Shen, 1997) use the human capital theory of occupational choice to suggest that individual teachers make systematic assessments of the costs and benefits of remaining within the profession or leaving it. Job satisfaction is of great importance to teachers making these assessments (Shann, 1998). In the case of AB, he can visualise the benefits, such as satisfactory salary, holidays and freedom to explore other occupational choices, only subsuming the negative aspects for a period of six to ten years. This is not unusual according to Grissmer and Kirby (1989 cited in Shen, 1997), Shann (1998) and Shen (1997), as the attrition rate for young teachers in the early stages of their career, such as AB is high, while teachers with seniority, experience and in the middle stage of their career (such as CD) have a lower attrition rate, and teachers nearing the end of their career (such as EF), exhibit higher attrition rates again. Therefore the attainment of the 16 per cent pay increase was important to AB's personal satisfaction, however his professional satisfaction was negatively impacted upon during the dispute as he stated:

> *I couldn't believe how long it actually took for wage negotiations to take place. In four years time, they're going to do that again and they're going to go over this rigmarole again ... I can't really be bothered doing it all over again.*

For CD, the dispute was professionally very unsatisfying, as he perceived the industrial dispute as yet another forum within which the status of the teaching profession was attacked and diminished by the government and the community. This is evident in his statement:

> *...it felt like another punch to the body ... It meant to me, this is a real downside to it all.*

The overwhelming feeling of hopelessness in relation to the impact the industrial dispute had on their morale, is evident in the comments of AB and CD. However, the intrinsic rewards of teaching (such as helping students achieve) cannot be underestimated in their power to convince teachers that there are more advantages than disadvantages to teaching (Latham, 1998; Sinclair, 1990 cited in Boylan & McSwan, 1998; Shann, 1998; Shen, 1997; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). This is supported by Dinham and Scott (1997b, 1998, 1999), who discovered in their various studies, including a three-way comparison of Australian, New Zealand and English teachers, that the intrinsic and extrinsic concerns common to teachers in all nations and promotion positions, had significant impacts on their professional and personal satisfaction and retention within the profession.

Heafford and Jennison (1998), and Scott, Cox and Dinham (1999) discovered during their British studies, as did Boylan and McSwan (1998) in their Australian study, that many teachers, like the three participants in this particular project, remain within the profession because they derive so much satisfaction from working with young people both within the classroom and during out-of-school activities. The strong motivating factors of altruism, affiliation, facilitating student development and personal growth, as well as interactions with other staff members and professional challenges, clearly are important to teachers regardless of their nationality. CD affirmed this in his nomination that student interactions and the professional challenges of helping them to progress, as well as the working conditions, are the most important factors in his overall job satisfaction, when he stated:

> *I never became a teacher for the pay ... part of my decision was the lifestyle. It was the conditions that drew me to it and as I said earlier, working with kids rather adults ... I mean, the satisfaction I get out of teaching is working with kids and seeing them progress, whether they are talented or not ... I don't think my decision to continue teaching has been affected by the dispute ... Teaching is what I do and teaching is what I will do – forever I can see myself doing it ... I just love being with kids. I love working with kids.*

This study revealed that the three teachers interviewed were generally satisfied have chosen to remain within the profession. This is a similar result as the recent Australian studies by Turney, Sinclair and Cairns (1980), Watson, Hatton, Squires and Soliman (1989) and Sinclair, Dengate, Hill, Jeffries, Meyenn, Smith, Smith and Squires (1989 all cited in Boylan & McSwan, 1998), which revealed that the majority of rural NSW teachers reported high levels of career satisfaction. However, such a result should not be interpreted lightly. The teachers interviewed were also very dissatisfied with factors not directly associated with their actual teaching, but directly associated to the fulfilment of their role as teacher and which were highlighted during the industrial dispute (that is, status, alienation, pay and working conditions).

Thus, it is evident that the teachers in this particular small-scale study, are satisfied with their profession, but it is primarily factors intrinsic to the act of teaching that provide this satisfaction. The recent industrial dispute in NSW effectively highlighted this issue and led the teachers to reflect upon how they derive their professional and personal satisfaction. It was overwhelmingly clear that factors extrinsic to teaching, such as status, pay and role demands are contributing to the career dissatisfaction of teachers, while intrinsic rewards are keeping the teachers motivated and generally happy with their career choice. How long this can last is an important issue that must be addressed.

Conclusion

Theobald (1999) and the ASTEERC (1998) claim that the state of the teaching profession is one that currently characterised by: loss of status; low morale; mass desertion of the profession; the destruction of teacher unionism; a contract system of teaching labour; and a loss of collegiality as teachers and schools have to compete against each other in a capitalistic educational marketplace. The impact of the industrial dispute may be observed to have highlighted the malaise of many teachers and may have more serious consequences, with the optimism of many teachers such as those studied, being further negatively impacted upon. This optimism is essential as it allows them to derive such great satisfaction from intrinsic factors related to teaching and rationalise their dissatisfaction with factors extrinsic to the profession. If this diminution of optimism occurs, the ensuing damage may be extremely serious.

A small study such as this one, can only suggest issues requiring further study and draw tentative conclusions about the participants within its own context. This project, used grounded theory development to discover the main concerns of the participants in substantive areas such as the teachers being satisfied with teaching, but feeling dissatisfied the impact the industrial dispute had on their perceived status. While investigating the impact that the 1999/2000 dispute had on these teachers, it has become abundantly clear that the teachers want others to know how intense *and* complex their profession is and how alienated they feel from those outside the profession. Since this study took place, a further seventeen rural secondary school teachers have been interviewed with more rich data revealing how they perceive their profession and how they adapt in an ever-evolving professional environment. By using a grounded theory framework and integrating various relevant theoretical and empirical elements of the sociology of education and the sociology of change, it is intended that an accurate and in-depth theory of context may be developed. This would allow for the exploration of how secondary teachers cope with and adapt to societal, legal, economic, cultural and political change, and the impact this has on their lived realities.

This original study and the subsequent interviews that have taken place since have revealed that the teachers want someone to tell their stories, relating to the reality of teaching within the NSW education system. The smaller study focused on the experiences of three rural secondary school teachers and their experiences during the 1999/2000 dispute. The data then provided a new research direction as it was indicated that there were much wider concerns and issues involved in the lived realities of these teachers that went beyond the scope of the interviews that related to their experiences during the industrial dispute, such as the demands of educational policy modification and implication placed on their already intense workload. This has reportedly been one of the most unsatisfactory aspects of their profession and has a significant impact upon their professional and personal satisfaction.

By delimiting the existing parameters and extending the focus beyond the historical context of the industrial dispute to consider the wider ramifications of change agendas in terms of the lived reality of teachers it is hoped that a more comprehensive representation of their realities may be revealed, which may then have an informative impact on those within and outside the profession (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

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The next chapter

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Abstract

HREOC National Inquiry in to rural and Remote Education in Australia, 1999-2000

At the 1999 SPERA Conference in Kalgoorlie a workshop was dedicated to developing a submission for the data gathering stage of the HREOC Inquiry. At the Cairns Conference, July 2000, Chris Sidoti, the Human Rights Commissioner, presented a keynote address on the emerging themes in the data and the recommendations going forward to the Federal Government.

This is not the end of the story, but rather the beginning. The next chapter will involve you as a 2001 conference participant. Members of the SPERA Executive will facilitate a workshop identifying key issues in the recommendations. The aim is to create an action plan which will allow SPERA to provide advocacy and support for rural communities in their endeavours to provide a quality education for their rural students. The workshop will provide the framework for the sharing of concerns, issues and experiences relating to education and training in rural areas.

SPERA submission 1999

A submission was compiled by the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia Inc (SPERA). Members and the Executive were asked for their viewpoints and a draft document was prepared. As our membership base is across all states, the issues raised were diverse and cover all levels of education.

The draft document was then taken to the annual conference held in Kalgoorlie. The conference attracted 150 participants from across Australia and included teachers, parents, administrators, private providers, tertiary educators and other community groups. A workshop group discussed each focus point and added further comments and then all participants were invited to add other issues or points.

SPERA believes that this submission was consultative and brought together viewpoints from across all education sectors involved in rural or remote education.

The submission was prepared under a number of headings as outlined in the original discussion documents.

a. The costs for families associated with education for children in rural and/or remote areas

- Costs can be significantly high, particularly for families with gifted and talented children, or those with learning disabilities. Often accessing full curriculum opportunities incurs additional costs for families in these areas. Costs can be exacerbated by the fact that the only access to secondary schooling is at a boarding school.
- Availability of quality education through technology is an additional financial burden for many families.
- Greater access to funding provision could be made for rural/remote/distance education schools to allow travel to provincial centres for educational activities.

b. The equity and adequacy of social security and other provisions to support children in education

- Families require the same support as those in less remote locations and the systems and resources need to be in place to adequately provide this support.
- Staffing levels in distance education schools in some states are often inadequate for special needs students, this needs to be addressed as it is in mainstream schooling.
- Historical funding models are in urgent need of overhauling. Current funding and staff allocations to rural/remote schools that allow for comparable outcomes to students in urban areas do not exist. This is a particular problem when considering the increased costs of technology.
- Specialist support, e.g., school psychologists, and general Education support should be based or be able to provide on-going support in remote areas. Currently the support is inadequate or non-existent for remote schools in many states.
- Providing support in remote areas will require adequate resourcing and provision of accommodation, travel etc as well as local district training and support.
- A key issue for support in remote areas is the lack of relief teachers who can step in when other staff are sick or wish to attend professional development. Many teachers

on relief register will not travel or stay in remote settings and a new system of support needs to be put in place with appropriate resources.

- Government systems or private providers need to establish train the trainer courses for Aboriginal Field Officers. This will allow field officers to come from local communities, training and working with their own people. A key issue for success.

c. Funding models for education and related services, including transport and accommodation

- Families need a one-stop shop provided by an "umbrella organisation' where they can go for information. Often the most difficult tasks for families are what question do I need to ask and where do I ask them.
- Current AIC allowances could be made more educationally useable by tying some of the funds directly to the families chosen school.
- For rural/remote families there are always additional costs if they wish their children to receive equitable outcomes/opportunities as the children in urban areas. SPERA considers there is a need for consideration of inequitable resource provision for equitable outcomes!

d. Teacher incentives, professional development and retention

- Encourage universities to provide preparation and practical experience in rural and remote schools for pre-service teachers. Government to assist with additional costs for practical experiences in country areas. Employment systems then need to look at the experience of the graduates and appoint them according to their practical experiences. Some universities (e.g., USQ, CQU, CSU) are currently conducting programs in rural and remote areas and often these students end up with appointments on the coast!
- Universities and education systems should look at establishing internships/extended practicum for final semester in rural and remote settings. This will require availability of accommodation; review of current supervision models and establishment of local support/mentoring systems.
- Encourage partnerships between universities and private industry/grants to fund practical opportunities (scholarships) for education students to experience teaching in rural and remote settings. Examples of current practice are:

  - The scholarship program between The Chamber of Minerals and Energy and Edith Cowan University, WA
  - The rural experience program between ICPA and QUT, Queensland;
  - The Isolated Schools Project between PCAP, Education Queensland and USQ, Queensland.
- Perhaps a scheme can be implemented which encourages rural/regional teachers to access university education via technology to offset costs. Universities need to consider marketing their courses to support those in rural and remote locations.
- Pay HECS for those teachers who wish to continue with study. This could be calculated on a service ration, i.e., 1 year of service in a remote school then a proportion of HECS is available.
- A real problem for attracting and keeping teachers to rural/regional settings is the negative mythology that abounds about the work conditions and lifestyle of country people. A program of information and encouragement to targeted groups is required more than additional financial incentives.
- Housing needs to be reviewed in all states to encourage more experienced, mature teachers and teachers with families to take up rural/remote teaching positions. There is a need to recognise the changing profile of graduating teachers, as many are mature-aged and have worked in other professions and have families to consider.
- Support/mentoring networks need to be strengthened or established for new teachers in rural and remote schools. Teachers coming to areas for the first time need professional and personal support.
- Adequate itinerant relief specialist teachers (e.g., literacy support) to provide support for teachers in remote/rural schools. Itinerant relief would allow more opportunities for Professional development.
- The whole provision of professional development needs to be reviewed. Many states expect more remote teachers to complete PD on weekends and in holidays because they cannot attend after school sessions. Costs for attending sessions often up to 8 hours away can also be prohibitive. One example of good practice is the Land schools of the Goldfields district, WA who finish school a week early to attend PD in Kalgoorlie.

e. The quality of distance education

- Provide specialised training for teachers who are placed in these schools.
- Encourage universities to provide preparation and practical experience in distance education schools for preservice teachers.
- Encourage employment authorities to then place graduates into these settings following their training and practical experience.
- Currently distance Education services for senior students are centralised in the capital cities, which is obviously cost effective. However this reduces the personalisation of services to students. This is particularly difficult for students in the north of Qld and WA.
- Regional senior schooling options need to be made available allowing the service delivery to be closer to the student's geographic location. This could also benefit students utilising distance education in smaller rural high schools as they could link into their closest distance education site. Adequately resourcing/staffing this regional service delivery would assist the regional development/rural revitalisation agendas of other government sectors.
- The quality of Primary distance education materials has vastly improved in the last ten years and with continually review, upgrade and resources this quality can be maintained. However the quality of provision for the Secondary curriculum is patchy based on the inadequate level of resourcing provided over the last decade.

f. The quality of technological support for teaching and learning in rural and/or remote areas

- In many areas signals and satellites are very poor.
- Often telephone lines are down in areas such as the Goldfields remote area of WA.
- Very little technological support is provided to remote schools or families. This needs to be specifically funded.
- There is a potential for technology to further remove the personalisation of educational services for rural and remote services.
- Access to Internet is patchy and generally not sustainable both in terms of capacity of technology to allow access at an appropriate band rate and through the cost of accessing points of presence (POPs).

- Target rates and funding for hardware provision to distance education schools is generally the same as for mainstream (e.g. in Qld the target for 2001 is 1 computer for every 7.5 students). Inevitably in a distance education setting this further increases the gap between information rich and information poor.
- SPERA considers that as educational access becomes increasingly dependent on technology this will be the largest single factor in creating inequities between rural/remote and urban students.
- There is a need to explore strategies or partnerships that can link organisations and government sectors with interests in rural and remote settings throughout Australia. In this way joint programs that facilitate distance education through technology and across state borders would become effective and provide opportunities across other systems, such as rural health.
- The next Federal Government 5 year plan on technology must ensure:

  band width technology is appropriate and useable across the whole of Australia;

  teacher professional development for rural and remote as well as urban settings is included so that when the technology arrives it will be utilised; not have to wait until a trained person is transferred to the school;

  on-line curriculum content must be addressed. This is a key to access and provision for all rural and remote students but must occur along with points 1,2 &4; and

  tariff costs must be reviewed to keep within local call costs. If this is not addressed points 1,2 & 3 will be prohibitive to many students and educators in rural and remote settings.

  These 4 points are key issues in the access and delivery debate for all education in rural and remote settings. If these are addressed then technology truly will become a tool for teachers in these settings and improve the quality of education provision.

g. The cultural appropriateness of education services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their communities.

- Cultural appropriateness is essential for all school sites and varies across rural/remote Australia.
- These communities need to voice issues through their own councils and then on to the Education Departments in the various states. Often information overload from so

many committees/departments/systems with no communication often means repetition in consultation but no consistent action.

- Currently the message is clear - transience, poor attendance, poor retention. Some programs are working well and should be promoted as good practice and information for others, such as the Student at Risk programs through East Kalgoorlie Primary School and the Goldfields District of WA.
- Parents need more help in understanding the importance of education; ie. cultural training to identify and remove the barriers.
- Suggest that community development projects in each community could be adopted for Education as a 10 year plan with appropriate funding. Often the funding for these projects is limited to short periods and doesn't allow for full potential or development.
- Aboriginal communities face difficulties in funding continuity. Plans need to be reviewed and extended, not continually redeveloped.
- In a distance Education setting indigenous students need effective tutor support. Currently DEETYA guidelines do not allow for support at the level necessary. DEETYA needs to relax guidelines/policies to allow committees to nominate Aboriginal Community representatives to undertake appropriate training to deliver effective tutorial support.
- There is a need to review Distance education practices so that they are compatible to indigenous learning styles- for an example see the Katherine School of the Air Program which won the 1998 Australian Rural education Award for their Aboriginal program.
- When new curriculum frameworks are being developed there is a need to be inclusive to avoid the current situation of incompatibility with local culture.
- Preservice and inservice training and preparation for indigenous teachers' needs to be culturally appropriate.
- There is a need for curriculum guidelines etc to allow ESL students to be literate in their first language prior to the introduction of English.

SPERA responds in 2001 to the HREOC recommendations

At the annual conference in Cairns in July 2000, Chris Sidoti, the Human Rights Commissioner presented some of the findings to the conference participants. Through the remainder of 2000 SPERA received all reports on the outcomes of the enquiry. The Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia Inc (SPERA) considered that the report then needed to be acted upon.

Conference participants at the 2001 SPERA conference in Wagga Wagga were asked for their viewpoints on some of the recommendations. The following is a brief summary of the outcome of the various discussions held by workshop participants.

The availability of school education

SPERA fully supports the following recommendations:

All teacher training institutions should require undergraduates to study a module on teaching in rural and remote communities, offer all students an option to undertake a fully-funded practical placement (teaching experience) in a rural or remote school and assist rural and remote communities in the direct recruitment of new graduates for their schools.

There is a need for universities and education systems to consider providing these opportunities through scholarships. This could be achieved through various incentives such as:

cheaper housing
zone allowance
travel allowance

In order to facilitate this activity SPERA could become more proactive by:

- Contacting state systems/ Catholic diocese/ DEET with the issues
- Preparing a flier to encourage good practice
- Showcasing good practice through a variety of mediums
- Promoting the inclusion of rural and regional preparation and practice.

The Commonwealth should ensure adequate funding to all institutions to enable them to offer practical rural and remote teaching experience placements.

SPERA could prepare fliers/letters and send them to the Education Ministers (State and Federal) highlighting the key issues. There is a need for these to be modified to suit regional focus.

All States and Territories should implement remote community based teacher and assistant teacher training programs delivered by distance education mode with regular short residential on-campus programs. Ideally a proven program will be franchised to other institutions for implementation in specified regions.

SPERA needs to raise awareness of the value of achieving this recommendation by:

- highlighting the issues relating to local people in rural and remote communities being forced to move out of communities; and
- funding/pastoral care needs to be accessed for those leaving their community to study

Policy framework

SPERA should support and promote the various policies that assist the quality provision of education in rural Australia by:

- creating a specific focus to disseminate information on best practice;
- developing a strategy for highlighting rural education;
- improving networking and links with rural schools;
- preparing and promoting statements about the positive activities and success stories of current rural educators;
- supporting the recommended Rural School communities task force;
- advocating that CAP funding should be continued, with an increase in the level of funding and highlighting the benefits of community partnerships; and
- exploring ways of ensuring better use/ sharing of facilities/resources in rural and remote settings.

The retention of teachers in rural areas

SPERA supports the need for a review of the staffing levels in rural and remote schools to ensure that the current levels are maintained or improved. This will often mean a different approach to the staffing of larger, metropolitan schools.

With novice teachers SPERA will advocate for:

- a reduced workload to allow for development and building on strengths;
- a mentoring program that provides full support for the teachers in isolated settings; and
- meaningful induction programs with a relevance for novice rural educators.

SPERA needs to investigate the preparation of a framework for an induction program for rural educators.

SPERA is to continue to celebrate and promote the initiatives that rural educators demonstrate through the annual conference, the Australian Rural Education Award and the newsletters and journal, *Education in Rural Australia*.

The intention now is for the executive of SPERA to review these outcomes and endeavour to achieve the recommendations through the organisation of SPERA and its networks. The challenge is to ensure that the story is fully told and action occurs so that quality outcomes may be achieved.

Swings and roundabouts: A panel presentation on the preparation of pre-service teachers for rural schools

Sheila King, Felicity Masson, Louise Pritchard
(University of Southern Queensland)
Sherrin Bell
(Tara State School)

Abstract

On the swings of teacher preparation we look at the highs and lows of practical experience that is available to preservice teachers at USQ. The panel will present many perspectives of rural experiences. As a workshop participant hop on to the roundabout and share your ideas with others. Let us challenge current thinking and consider best practice to encourage tertiary educators across Australia to rethink the opportunities being provided for our preserve teachers. Who knows we may even take a roller coaster ride before we finish! In the playground of teacher preparation we look at the highs and lows of practical experience that is available to preservice teachers at the Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland. This panel presentation provides various perspectives of these rural experiences.

As a regional university, USQ prides itself in catering for the needs of rural and remote students. Over a number of years the Faculty of Education has explored ways of providing the preservice teachers with opportunities to complete practical experiences in rural and remote schools and centres.

Felicity comments on her involvement in the Isolated Children's Project and the isolated Schools Project-

The Isolated Children's Program (ICP), was an experience that I will never forget. My experience took place on a not so little Station called "Devoncourt", which is situated about an hour south of Cloncurry in Queensland. My students consisted of two boys one in year six and the other in year seven. This adventure as part of my pre-service training was an experience which allowed me, for three weeks, to observe and live a way of life which help me to understand, appreciate and a "*try before you buy type of experience*." I know now that I definitely do not want to be a governess but I would, if the opportunity arose, consider working in a Distance Education School.

The Isolated Children's Project is a program run by the University of Southern Queensland and is offered to second and third year Bachelor of Education students who are interested in Rural Education. These students apply for this practicum experience on a volunteer basis and are given the opportunity to complete two weeks living with a host family where the children receive their education through schools of distance education.

The travel for the USQ students is funded through sponsorship and the families provide accommodation and meals.

The experience brought to my attention the issues concerning this type of education. It also broadened my thinking into other areas such as isolated schools and the following year, I participated in the Isolated School's Program (ISP) and found this to be just as beneficial if not more. I feel as a pre-service teacher this opportunity to take on a teaching position in a community such as Normanton, reinforced confidence within myself that I could handle just about any teaching position that I was given next year.

Both programs allowed me to see country I had never seen before, which has given me broader knowledge about Queensland and will allow me to make informed choices to where I will teach.

Both of these programs are a must for pre-service teachers interested in and willing to teach in the rural and isolated schools and distance education schools. These programs I feel should not be forced on to pre-service teachers, it should be their choice to participate. However without the financial support received from PCAP, ICPA and the University, these programs would not exist.

Louise now comments on her involvement in the Isolated Schools Project-

The Isolated Schools Project is a program run by the University of Southern Queensland and is offered to final year Bachelor of Education students who are interested in Rural Education. These students apply for this practicum experience on a volunteer basis and are given the opportunity to complete three weeks in and isolated rural community school. The community provides the students with accommodation and a chance to experience their way of life.

This program runs in January/February each year offering students the unique opportunity of completing a block of practicum at the commencement of the school year. This has proven to be extremely beneficial to students as most other practical experiences in schools are offered part way through the year. It also provides extra assistance for the teachers involved at a very busy time.

One of the main aims of this program is to encourage graduating students to consider employment in rural or isolated areas of the state of Queensland. The experience runs for a short duration to merely give students a taste of what it would be like to teach in these situations but does not interfere with other university commitments. The students who undertake this experience do so in their own time over the Christmas vacation period from university study.

Teaching full time in a community such as the one I was lucky enough to experience while participating in this program would be very rewarding but on the other hand extremely demanding. Such a position would require single teachers to spend a lot of time alone and create the need to become comfortable with the local wildlife and the varying climates that some of these locations pose.

Perhaps the main benefit of such a program for student teachers is that they are able to determine whether or not they feel this type of position would be suitable for them before they apply for or are offered employment.

I personally found the three week experience extremely enriching after spending time in a very different community than what I am used to, both culturally and geographically.

The Isolated Schools Project is a great program for students that are interested in Rural Education as a career option and is rare in that it is only offered at the University of Southern Queensland and in no other institutions throughout Australia. Hopefully by sharing experiences with others this type of program can become more widely spread throughout Australia. These types of opportunities are essential for student teachers to really take a grasp on future education particularly in the rural or isolated setting.

Sherrin shares her thoughts about her preparation for teaching in South west Queensland-

Having completed the Isolated Children's Project and the Isolated Schools project I chose to complete an elective '*Teaching in Small Rural Communities*'. This unit allowed me to explore a variety of issues facing the novice teacher in a rural or remote school. I was required to adopt a rural school and investigate many aspects of rurality facing the teachers, students and communities. These investigations provide the basis of an assessment presentation in the format of a conference poster presentation where our views are challenged by our lecturers and fellow students.

Another aspect of the course is that the final extended practicum for the preservice teachers occurs in small schools where the teachers work in multiage classrooms. This is an invaluable preparation for the teaching in most areas of Australia outside the main cities. My background is very much a metropolitan one and so the experiences that I received certainly allowed me to explore career options. The experiences not only prepared me for teaching in rural areas but encouraged me to apply for positions away from the coast.

Let us challenge current thinking and consider best practice to encourage tertiary educators across Australia to rethink the opportunities being provided for our preservice teachers. We must find the opportunities and utilise our resources in a more productive way to allow our future educators to achieve these goals. The experiences these students participated in have proved valuable in their preparation for teaching in rural and remote schools. it is important that the novice teachers gain practical experience in these settings if they are to be successful in their teaching in these areas.

Details of the various projects refered to in this article:

APPENDIX 1-The Isolated Children's Project

This project allows Faculty of Education students the opportunity to work with children who receive their education through the Schools of Distance Education. Participants live on a property for approximately two (2) weeks and are required to:

- work with the pupils on the Distance Education papers;
- provide enrichment and extension activities wherever possible;
- participate in all activities with the host family;
- participate in on air lessons where appropriate; and
- complete a minimum of 30 hours experience with the children.

Prior to the commencement of the project all *students* are required to:

- **Attend two preparatory sessions**
  1. Session 1 is a general preparation for the project and includes such items as travel; living in rural settings; what is Distance Education; what to take; student responsibilities.
  2. Session 2 is more specific about the role of the home tutor and the expectations of the USQ student; on-air lessons; the role of the SDE teacher; student placement.
- **Communicate with the host family**
  1. An Introductory letter.
  2. Phone call of confirmation of travel etc
- **Become familiar with Distance Education papers**
  1. Work through basic information in a training session.
  2. Review other SDE papers
  3. Discuss specific needs with the Host parent.
- At the conclusion of the project all students are required to submit a written report/diary.

Prior to the commencement of the project all ***host families*** are required to:

- Apply for participation, providing details for use in placing USQ students.
- Communicate with the USQ student:
  1. Provide information to the student in response to a letter.
  2. Communicate by phone with student/USQ to confirm travel arrangements
- Collect and return student to agreed upon centre for travel purposes
- Discuss with the student on arrival:
  1. Specific requirements for the Host family.
  2. Outline of the school day.
  3. Procedures and deadlines for the SDE papers.
  4. Other useful information to ensure the succcess of the experience for all parties.

- At the conclusion of the project all host families are required to submit two written reports.

Basic transport costs for the project are covered by sponsorship and the host family provides accommodation and meals.

APPENDIX 2-ISOLATED SCHOOLS PROJECT

The aim of the project is to allow participants to experience teaching in a small, isolated school in a non-evaluative situation. One objective of the project is to encourage graduating teachers to view teaching in a rural setting as a positive experience. Participants volunteer for the experience and complete the activity in the vacation period, in January/February. The placement has proved particularly successful as students experience first hand the commencement of a school year and teachers have extra help at a very busy period. The majority of participants return from this experience with a positive outlook on teaching in a rural setting. As there is no formal evaluation of this experience then the student is able to work alongside the teacher as a teaching assistant, which proves to be most valuable.

The project is co-ordinated by USQ with assistance from regional personnel. Departmental funding, PCAP and ICPA support pay for the travel costs. Accommodation is provided within the school community.

Student responsibilities

- Prior to commencement of the experience
  - Attend preparatory sessions
  - Communicate with host school
  - Finalise accommodation details
- Participate in regional orientation or pupil free day activities where applicable
- Attend school for all school sessions
- Teach a minimum of twenty lessons over the three week period
- Prepare all lessons under the guidance of the participating teacher
- Assist the teacher in all school activities
- Participate in community activities where appropriate
- Interact with children in informal settings

On completion of the experience the student is required to present a report on the role of the teacher in an isolated community. (This report may be used in a teaching situation.)

Host school requirements

- Prior to commencement of the experience
  - Ensure accommodation is available
  - Discuss specific requirements with student teachers
- Provide a teaching experience for a student teacher
- Encourage the student to participate in appropriate activities
- Provide a feedback statement on student performance (This is not an evaluation form.)

Education Queensland responsibilities

- Liase with Co-ordinator of Isolated Schools Project on all aspects of the project
- Nominate schools to be used in the project
- Negotiate the provision of funding for travel
- Co-ordinate transfer of students from regional centres and return, where necessary.

APPENDIX 3-Teaching in small rural communities

The predominant focus of this unit emphasises issues relating to the structure of education in rural Australia, teaching practice and curriculum delivery methods appropriate to a rural context, the integration of advanced teaching technologies with current information and communication technologies, concerns related to professional development and teacher support processes, school management issues, processes designed to support community relationships, and the political and systemic context of rural education.

Teaching methodology for this unit incorporates an experiential component which familiarises the student with an array of educational agencies providing services to rural communities. Understanding of the needs of specific rural education agencies will be further developed through a process of modelling, simulation and role-play. Participation in an analysis of both the larger policy context relevant to small rural schools and the administrative expectations appropriate for these settings completes the preparation of the beginning teacher for a rural placement.

This unit challenges the participants to look at the advantages of teaching and living in a rural setting. Particpants who take up the challenge will become more positive in their outlook and be better equipped to teach in a rural or remote school.

For further information on any of these programs please contact-

Coordinator of Field Experience
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Encouraging quality student teachers to teach in rural Western Australia

Rosa Lincoln
(Department of Education Services, Western Australia)

Abstract

This presentation discusses the role of the Rural Teaching Liaison Officer as well as describing the Student Teacher Scholarship which are offered to final undergraduate education students. The scholarship programme began in 1999 as the issues of supply and retention of teachers in rural Western Australia had become most challenging.. Partnerships with The Chamber of Minerals and Energy, the Education Department of WA Department of Commerce and Trade, Ansett and Skywest were created which provided financial and in kind sponsorship for the scholarship programme. The overall aim of the programme was to give metropolitan based students the opportunity to live and work in a rural location which hopefully would encourage them to consider a rural teaching position upon graduation.

Scholarships

To be eligible for a student teacher scholarship the students:

- were to be in their final year of their teaching qualification;
- were about to complete their final teaching practice;
- had minimal experience in working and living in rural areas;
- had a course average of 60% or higher;
- had completed all other teaching practices to a satisfactory level; and
- be recommended by their WA University.

The students submit applications which are then shortlisted by a panel and this is then followed by an interview.

The scholarship provides:

- return travel to the town;
- a stipend of $100 per week;
- financial support towards most of the accommodation costs; and

- access to a local Teaching Practice supervisor who is paid by the relevant University.

In 2000, 41 scholarships were distributed and 35 recipients elected to teach in rural Western Australia in 2001.

In 2001 a new scholarship was launched which is called 'Going Home' and this was established to support rural students who were enrolled at mostly metropolitan Universities and who wished to complete their final teaching practice in their rural hometown or district. The criteria, process and conditions are similar to the other scholarship with the exclusion of accommodation support. This scholarship is sponsored by Wesfarmers Dalgety and the Countryman newspaper.

Both scholarships are co-ordinated by the Rural Teaching Liaison Officer from the Department of Education Services. The scholarship concept has been well received by communities who see this as an opportunity to showcase and promote their district whilst addressing the issues of teacher supply and demand. Student teachers and their Universities are very keen to be involved in the programme as it provides a practical and theoretical rural dimension to their teaching qualification as 70% of the available teaching positions are in rural locations.

Role of the rural teaching officer

This position is a Level 7 Public Service and has a time allocation of .50 or 2 ½ days per week. It is collaboratively funded via the Department of Education Services, the Education Department of WA and the university sector. The duties of this officer include:

- negotiate efficiencies in rural practicums through liaison with universities;
- broker support and funding for rural practicums through liaising between schools, rural communities and other agencies;
- promote and organise an identified range of rural teaching scholarships;
- encourage Year 12 graduates from rural areas to enter teacher degree courses;
- encourage undergraduate and graduate teachers to enter the rural teaching service;

- liaise with universities over the relevancy of rural studies units in pre – service degree courses;
- liaise with rural bodies such as the Isolated Children's Parent's Association, the Country Women's Association and others to encourage support for identified education initiatives and in particular rural practicums;
- act as an advocate for rural teaching; and
- liaise with all sectors on teacher supply and demand.

School governance in rural communities – The role of the Board of Trustees chairperson in small New Zealand schools

Jan Martin
(University of Waikato)

Abstract

In the eleven years since the devolution to self-management the role of the Board of Trustees chairperson has emerged as critical to the success of the school-community partnership particularly in small rural communities. The importance of this partnership has received little attention as an area for research. This paper discusses a recent study of issues facing the Board chair as a lay, elected school leader working in partnership with the school principal. A group of four Board chairs, all farmers, took part in a series of interviews in which they discussed their motivation to accept the position of Board chair and the challenges and frustrations they face in their role. The paper considers a model of parental input developed by Hornby (1990) and demonstrates why it requires substantial modification to address the unique characteristics of rural schools.

Introduction

My background as a rural parent and trustee has ensured that I retain a vital interest in rural education. In this discussion, I describe aspects of a recent New Zealand study of Board chairpersons focussing on the involvement of parents as school trustees.

Background to the study

The 1989 reforms to education administration, known as *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange, 1988), led to the creation of radical new structures in an administrative system largely unchanged for decades. Introduced in October 1989, the reforms abolished the Department of Education, the regional Education Boards, all school committees and Boards of Governors and replaced these structures with a streamlined Ministry of Education and individual Boards of Trustees for each school. The Tomorrow's Schools reforms were based on the partnership model proposed in the report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration (the Picot Report):

> *The running of learning institutions should be a partnership between the teaching staff, (the professionals) and the community. The mechanism for creating such a partnership will be a Board of Trustees.* (1988 p. xi)

Each Board of Trustees (hereafter referred to as the Board) consisted of five elected parent representatives, the principal and an elected staff representative. Secondary schools also had an elected student representative and there was provision for Boards to co-opt a further four members to the Board to ensure that the Board had a range of skills and a fair representation of the parent community. The composition of Boards was designed to ensure that the powers of decision-making lay firmly with the parents of the school, as parent-elected members would always have the majority vote.

Boards of Trustees were given wide powers. The specific roles of the Board of Trustees and principal were defined in the Education Act, 1989. Under Section 75 of the Act, Boards of Trustees were given complete discretion to control the management of the school, as it felt fit. In practise, this control has obvious limitations. One of the main shifts in power was to give Boards of Trustees the employer role. While salaries remain centrally funded Boards of Trustees have the responsibility to employ staff and manage their performance. Trustees have control of the budget allocation, some control over buildings and grounds and increasing responsibilities for monitoring and reporting student achievement.

One of the main tasks of Boards was to formulate a school charter. The charter was intended to set out the objectives of each school "drawn up locally within national objectives" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p.xi). The charter was seen as the "lynchpin" of the structure and would act as a contract between the community and the institution and the institution and the state" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p.ix). Lange (1988) also saw the relationship between the state and the institution as a two-way contract. The relationship between the school and the state is of particular importance to this study.

The concept of 'partnership' was intended to be an important element of the education reforms – both the partnership between the school and its local community, and the partnership between the school and the state. The establishment of Boards of Trustees was fundamental to these partnerships because the Board of Trustees was to act both as the link between the community and school and as the agent of the school in its relationship with the crown. In pursuing the ideal of partnership, the New Zealand education reforms differed significantly from other models of devolution. In many countries such as Britain and the United States, where education administration has been devolved to the site level, the power has shifted to the school itself through the principal. In the New Zealand model, the devolution was political rather than administrative (Education Review Office, 1999a) because the power shifted from central government to local communities through the establishment of individual Boards of Trustees for each school.

Smelt (1998) summarised the reforms under four major headings; increased choice for parents between schools, devolution of power to individual school level, increased voice for parents through the Board of Trustees and also through the ability to leave the school or create a school within a school and a move to a contractual relationship between schools, the government and the community.

Historically, New Zealand governments have provided equal educational opportunities for all children, urban and rural (Baty,1989). This policy led to the establishment of a large number of small schools scattered throughout rural New Zealand. Currently over 65% of all New Zealand schools have teaching principals and the majority of these are in rural areas. This study focuses on school governance in small rural schools.

The research design chosen for this project was a qualitative case study approach that uses a comparative, inductive methodology. The case study approach is particularly suited to this study because it gives the framework to conduct an investigation of people in a particular role. In looking at the particularistic nature of case studies, Merriam looks at how the case focuses on a particular situation, event or programme. This makes case study a good design for focussing on a practical problem. Shaw (in Merriam, 1998 p 29) tells how case studies "concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation."

I chose to use interviewing as the primary method of gathering data. Interviewing is "one of the most common and powerful ways we use to try and understand our fellow beings" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 361). Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore people's view of reality and gain the "thick, rich data" qualitative research is known for. This may make the analysis of data more difficult but it allows more flexibility in the data gathering. While I used a set of generic questions the participants often added other comments. Allowing for this flexibility enabled me to gain some systematic data but also allowed for issues that were important to the Board Chairs to emerge.

Participants were selected to meet the following criteria:

- schools within a two hour drive from my home;
- schools with teaching principals;
- chairpersons who have held the position for at least one full year; and
- a mix of male and female participants.

There was no measure made of the effectiveness of the school, staff or Board of Trustees when selecting participants. In reality, finding participants was the easiest part of the process and more people were keen to take part in the study than I could accommodate. The group comprised two men and two women, all farmers and all of who have been trustees for at least four years. The participants had a combined total of 25 years experience as school trustees and 17 years as Board Chairs. Each participant agreed to take part in two interviews, provide me with school documentation and allow me to observe at Board of Trustee meetings. Later in the study, I asked them to keep a log of time spent on Board of Trustee business. All interviews were taped and transcribed and the transcripts returned to participants for checking. For some this was a formality, whereas others took the opportunity to add to and clarify some of their responses.

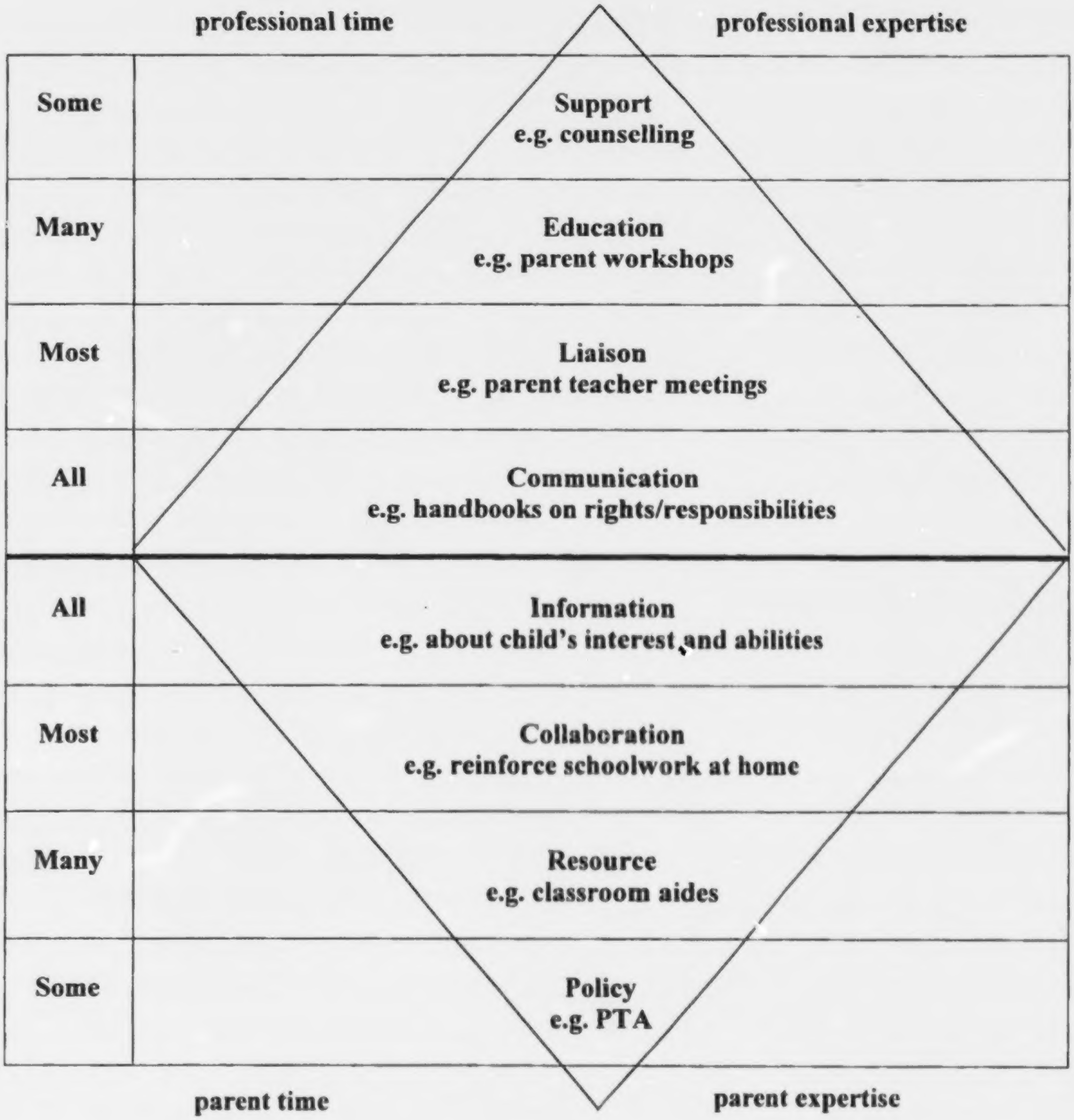
Participants were pleased to talk of their experiences as a Board of Trustees chair. They were keen to be listened to and wanted their voices heard. The conversations largely took place over coffee in the farm kitchen and the tapes are punctuated by the noise of dogs, cattle and birdsong. I have kept in touch with participants by telephone and letter and this relationship has enabled me to gather further data where necessary.

The research revealed some fascinating findings in relation to the skills and training needed, the leadership style adopted by Board chairs and the tension between central and local government. The importance of the relationship between the principal and the Board chair was also highlighted. In this paper I limit the scope of my discussions on the research findings to examining parent participation in education in small rural schools.

Much has been written of the importance of parental involvement in their children's schooling. Research conducted in New Zealand (Ramsay, Harold, Hawk, Kaii & Poskitt, 1989, p.9) stated: "There are highly significant gains for parents, for teachers and above all for students if parents and caregivers become fully involved in their children's education."

Several theoretical models have been created (Hornby, 1990; Ramsay et al., 1993) to arrange levels of parent involvement in education in a hierarchical structure.

Hornby (1990) developed a theoretical model to guide the practice of parent involvement. His model, (see Figure 1), consisted of two pyramids, one a hierarchy encompassing parent needs and the other encompassing parent strengths and possible contributions. Hornby argued that all parents have some needs and strengths but only a small number have an intense need for guidance or have the capability of making an extensive contribution especially in the area of governance. His framework shows a broad base encompassing all parents at the information and communication stages, tapering off to a few parents that give policy support such as through membership of school governing bodies or advocacy groups.



Some	Support e.g. counselling
Many	Education e.g. parent workshops
Most	Liaison e.g. parent teacher meetings
All	Communication e.g. handbooks on rights/responsibilities
All	Information e.g. about child's interest and abilities
Most	Collaboration e.g. reinforce schoolwork at home
Many	Resource e.g. classroom aides
Some	Policy e.g. PTA

Figure 1: Parent involvement in education (after Hornby, 1990)

This model provides an interesting framework in which to look at parent involvement in school governance. Rural communities throughout much of New Zealand are experiencing a decline in population. Farms are amalgamating into larger units, family size is dropping and as a general trend, the number of primary school age children is declining throughout the country.

Changes in the nature of rural communities compound the pressures of the Board chair. All participants talked about changes that were occurring in their communities. For Yellow School, the reduction in student numbers has changed its status to a single teacher school. Green School is considering merger options and Blue and Orange schools have both had their rolls drop by half in the last ten years. Empty houses on farms, and in the rural communities, are often rented to single parents and beneficiaries and Board chairs noted that these people were more transient and less likely to be involved in the life of the school and community. Mike noted that there had been substantial changes in the Blue School community:

> *Because of both parents working, the rural trend is that there are not many guys employing labour any more. Farms are going larger, but there is one guy managing ... 1000 or 1500 acres and he just gets casual guys in to work ... You have got people that are sort of 'fly by nighters' ... and they sent their kids to school because it is convenient and they don't take part in anything.* (Mike)

This change in the nature of the community was especially apparent at Calf Club Day, an important event in small rural schools. Yellow School no longer held its own day because of the decline in animal numbers. For Blue School the change over the last ten years was also very evident. Mike continued:

> *So from a school of 56 pupils we have probably only got- I think it is between less than 30 that are actually involved in agriculture and at one stage nearly 70 or 80% of the children were involved in agriculture. So the calf club for example was a really strong day. You'd have up to 30 calves and you had anything from 50 to 60 lambs, but now you would be struggling to get 10 calves and probably 10 lambs.* (Mike)

The very rapid drop in school rolls is creating problems for the Boards as funding for schools has a significant per capita component:

> *We are constantly struggling to stretch the budget ... If your roll goes down the fixed costs are very much the same ... but there is not a lot you can cut back on.* (Prue)

Another consequence of the drop in school rolls is that there are fewer parents available to be trustees. Rural Boards of Trustees may face problems because they have a smaller group of parents to draw trustees from and they often have difficulty in accessing appropriate training due to their isolation (Yeoman, 1997).

Board chairs were concerned about this. Dave worried about what would happen when all available people in the community had had their turn at being a trustee.

> *Because we have had 10 or 11 years of Boards of Trustees, in most communities we had been through [all the potential trustees] and communities aren't changing. They haven't got younger people; the farmers are all getting older in rural communities.* (Dave)

The drop in school rolls also means a decline in the staff numbers at the schools. This has led to strenuous efforts by some communities to self-fund extra staff. At Orange School, the Parent Teacher Association raised $10,000 in 2000 to fund a part time third teacher. Yellow School allocated significant funds to increase the teacher aide hours to support the sole charge principal. Blue School could face the issue of redeployment in the next few years and Mike worried about the impact of the Board's responsibility for carrying out the redeployment exercise on the staff–trustee relationship. Board chairs were put in difficult situations in such instances.

> *I can't see where the Board's gone wrong. We have tried to market the school to the best of our ability ... and at the end of the day someone has got to bite the bullet and say, "You have got to go." Now whether I am the person to tell that teacher, I don't know ... you have got to go through it [the process] and at the end of the day someone is going to get very hurt and very emotional and it is going to be quite difficult for us.* (Mike)

Changing social structures and employment patterns are beyond the control of Boards of Trustees yet the nature and pace of this change impacts on their job, making it more difficult.

The theoretical model of parent participation proposed a hierarchical progression of parent involvement (Hornby, 1990). This model maintained that while most parents were involved at the basic level, only a few had the skills, expertise or interest to be involved at policy level. This study has shown that in small rural schools the triangle needs to change shape to a trapezoid and in fact, the smaller the school, the flatter the trapezoid. In the case of Yellow School, with a total of nine families, at any one time over half the total families will be involved in school governance. For Blue and Orange Schools, the proportion is about a quarter and in the larger Green School, probably nearer to a tenth. In a city school of 500 pupils about 2% of families will be involved as trustees – the difference is significant and has some interesting ramifications both on terms of skill level and commitment.

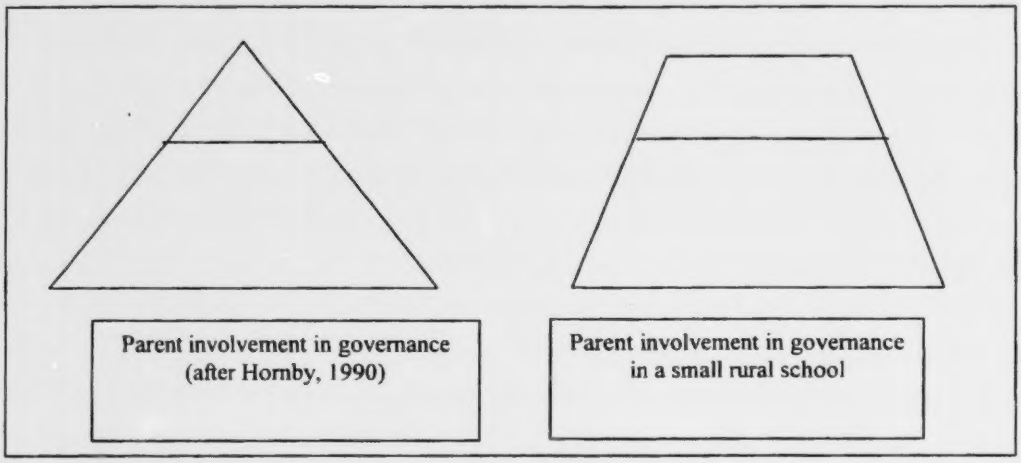

Parent involvement in governance (after Hornby, 1990)
Parent involvement in governance in a small rural school

Figure 2: Revised model of parent involvement in governance

The revised model can shed light on several issues. It may partially explain the theory of reluctance. If potential trustees are drawn from a much smaller pool, there may be more difficulty in getting trustees with the range of skills required for Board responsibilities. Similarly, if there is a much smaller pool of people to draw from, it seems likely that it will be harder to find leaders and there will have to be some degree of persuasion to get someone to take on the Board chair role. The level of trustee skills has been discussed in a number of reports (Gordon et al., 1994; Wylie, 1997a, 1999; ERO, 1999) and the difference in potential trustees' skills is most apparent in the high socio-economic level schools compared to low socio-economic level schools. Trustees in 'rich' schools have higher levels of education and are more likely to have professional occupations. Trustees in 'poor' schools are more likely to lack these skills and so look to co-opt trustees with business skills to assist the Board. Rural trustees are less likely to hold tertiary qualifications than their urban counterparts and only 15% of rural trustees have professional occupations compared to 50% of trustees in cities. Lack of expertise of trustees combined with the multiple roles expected of rural principals can lead to an increase in potential conflicts (Wylie 1997b).

The disparity between Boards whose members have professional skills and those who do not, is widened by the fact that those who do not have legal or accounting expertise on their Boards not only find some concepts of governance more difficult but also have to buy in the legal or financial expertise they need whereas the rich schools have expertise provided free (Gordon et al., 1994). The same principle applies to rural schools and again, the likelihood of having trustees with professional skills decreases the more remote and small the school is, while the cost of obtaining these skills increases with distance from a main centre. Rural school boards had around half the legal and industrial relations skills amongst their members as schools in other locations and fewer human resources/personnel skills (Wylie, 1997b).

All of the Board chairs in this study talked about the issue of attracting and retaining suitable trustees from a small pool of potential candidates both in number and range of occupations.

> *In a town it is probably easier and they also have way more diverse skills on the board and you probably have got the odd lawyer or accountant [and] people with degrees and professional qualifications and all sorts of occupations, out here you are limited. Basically if it is not a farmer it will be somebody who has been on a social benefit or something, living in a farm cottage.* (Mike)

Their comments agree with the ERO (1999) study of small schools that noted difficulty in obtaining a range of skills among trustees was a problem for very small schools.

A further dimension can be added by considering the motivation behind parent participation, which may give insight into why parents are prepared to act as trustees. The German sociologist Tonnies, writing in 1887 (cited in Sergiovanni, 1994), originally used the terms gemeinschaft and gesellschaft to show the shifts from hunting and gathering to the industrial society. At each shift, Tonnies claimed, there was a move from the concept of a sacred community (gemeinschaft) to a more secular society (gesellschaft). The social concepts of gemeinschaft and gesellschaft have been used by later writers (Harold, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1994) to add a further dimension to the study of school-community partnerships by examining the nature of the relationship between the parents and the school. The geimeinschaft relationship is based on " trust, intimacy and loyalty" (Harold, 1999, p.10). It comes from a common set of values, of sharing a common location, and of working together as a community (Sergiovanni, 1994). The gesellschaft relationship is a more business-like model relying on contractual relationships and less personal connections. Connections between people are more contrived and while groups coexist they are essentially separated. The Board of Trustees was created under a gesellschaft model of New Right market forces, yet the voluntary nature of the job and the partnership between school and community has geimenschaft overtones. Tonnies (cited in Sergiovanni, 1994) differentiated between natural will and rational will in explaining relationships. In geimeinschaft, people relate to each other and work together because they intrinsically want to (i.e. natural will). In gesellschaft people are using rational will and are motivated by what tangible reward they will obtain.

The Board chairs had similar reasons for joining the Board and generally their reasons had to do with supporting their children, the school and the community. This could be seen as geimenschaft. For Dave, it was "the chance to make things better for kids." He could see some huge deficiencies in the system and wanted to make a difference. Prue's reason for joining the Board was also that she was interested in kids and wanted to have some input into the school her children were attending. Mike echoed this view and also felt it was "my turn." For Sue, the motivation was more pragmatic. Her husband was retiring from the Board and the trustees accepted his resignation on the proviso that Sue accepted cooption to the Board. All the participants were active members of the community and were prepared to help the school. The theme of community service featured strongly in their motivation to become a trustee.

The motivation to become Board chair was a different story. One of the early questions I asked participants was how they became the Chairperson of their Board of Trustees. None of the participants actively sought and most did not want the chairperson's job. Two of the participants became Board chair by default as the following quotes illustrate:

> *I was it – there was no-one else.* (Sue)

> *It came down to the other person who had just had a short time on the Board and myself, but her husband didn't want her to do it so I took the job.* (Prue)

Mike was persuaded to stand for the position to provide an alternative to another candidate who wanted to be Board chair but who had no experience "and she came in with the proviso she was …going to change everything." (Mike)

Dave explained that in his case, he was the logical choice for Board chair as he was the only trustee with any experience after the election and he was prepared to be the leader. After completing an initial term on the board as a trustee he decided that he would prefer to lead "rather than getting frustrated 'sitting in the back seat of the bus'."

It appears that rather than the Board chair being a position trustees aspire to, in most of these cases the participants had little choice and were in this sense, 'reluctant leaders'.

Participants stood for the Board because they wanted to make a contribution to the school and community but most participants did not seek or even want the Board chair position.

There are two aspects of motivation that need to be explored – the motivation to become a trustee and the motivation to become the Board chair. An early study (Middleton & Oliver, 1990), revealed that approximately a third of trustees surveyed stood for election because they had previously served on a governing body and another third because they were approached to do so by specific individuals or community groups. Other reasons mentioned included a long involvement with the community and being well known locally. Later research, (O'Connell, 1995; Hawk, 1997) also found that standing as a trustee was an extension of previous community involvement. There was also an element of reciprocity involved, where parents wanted to be involved at the school their children were attending. The Board chairs in this study became trustees because they wanted to support their own children, contribute to the school and their community and because they thought they could make a difference. An example of this was Dave who spoke of one of the rewards of the job as seeing children achieve and seeing the community and the school working together. This sense of community duty ties in with the concept of geimeinschaft (Sergiovanni, 1994) where the motivation to do things comes from a common set of community values.

The motivation to become Board chair was somewhat different and it was an interesting and unexpected finding that most of the Board chairs were "reluctant leaders" and had taken on the position largely because there was no one else able or prepared to do so. I could find little evidence of other research in this area although Hawk (1997) noted that three of the six Board chairs in her study were reluctant to assume the position of Board chair and none of the six participants had actively sought the position. This concept of a 'reluctant leader' appears to add a further dimension to educational leadership and is an area that warrants further study.

The issue of role distinction can create pressure for Board chairs. It was important for them to separate their trustee role from their parent and community member roles:

> *As far as I'm concerned if I'm not at a board meeting or doing something for the board, I'm just one of the [community] members, and if we've got a fundraising thing on and somebody else is in charge of that, then that person is in charge. I don't go poking my nose in. I ask them what they want me to do. We've all got our places.* (Sue)

The issue of confidentiality could be problematic in rural communities. For example problems can occur when personnel issues arise in a school because trustees cannot discuss what is going on with anyone in the community. Others in the community often know that something is going on but they cannot be told about any action that is being taken because the matter was discussed by the Board 'in committee.' One participant mentioned a situation where there were complaints about the principal's performance that were being investigated by the Board. In this case, the participant knew exactly what was happening but could not share the information with others in the community. He went to the local chartered club for a drink after work but found everyone there wanted to find out what was happening at the school:

> *This is where you have a situation. It had to be kept secret, it had to be kept within the four walls of the board meeting. We have a club down the road here, I know - it was the first week of December - I went down for a*

> *drink on a Friday night after milking and I didn't get in the door. I came home because that is how bad it was. It divided the community right down the middle, because we couldn't tell them anything.* (Mike)

Several Board chairs spoke of the personal cost of being a leader in a small community. Dave put it like this:

> *It is pretty tough stuff all right and it becomes extremely personal where I think that you are exposed to some of these personal things that are beyond your control and you haven't created the situations.* (Dave)

The closeness of the school to the community can create extra pressures for Board chairs in their relationship with the community and in managing the principal's performance, but can also have positive impacts. Wright (2000) contended that small schools tend to have staff committed to their community because of the time spent within it and the 'intimacy inherent in small populations.' The Board chairs in this study acknowledge the intimacy that exists in country districts as Sue highlighted in her discussion on the contribution the community made to the school. One principal described it as "living and working under a microscope" (Martin, 1999, p. 22). The nature of the school community partnership is such that negotiation is a constant feature. There is a very real danger of negotiation turning into conflict which if unresolved can completely divide a community and create permanent divisions. Most rural communities have factions that have 'fallen out' over minor issues at some stage in the past. One Board chair related the story of a conflict between Board members that resulted in a trustee resigning acrimoniously and added he had not spoken to that person since then. There seems no easy solution to this problem.

While there are mechanisms in place to work through procedures such as redeployment, the intimacy of small communities makes the human cost of decisions more transparent. Mike knows that redeployment is likely to occur at Blue School within the next twelve months, he knows there is a process the Board has to follow but he worries about hurting community members by making them redundant. He also knows that if he is the Board chair at that stage, he will be the one to tell one of the teachers that they no longer have a job. In a similar way, the Board at Yellow School discussed whether to leave the lawn mowing contract with a local person or let it more cheaply to a larger contractor. Again, because of the nature of the small community, Sue felt the personal responsibility for making the decision and relaying it to the person concerned. As in the discussion on community conflict, there is no obvious solution to this tension but the findings highlight the need for Board chairs to have easy access to support from external agencies such as the School Trustees Association when faced with difficult personnel decisions.

In a small rural community, Sue and Mike are certain to meet the people they have been dealing with in their 'employer' role as Board chair, at community functions where their role is that of friends and neighbours in the district. The part time voluntary nature of the Board chair position makes implementing these personnel decisions very difficult.

The findings of this study have led me to make the tentative conclusion that the job of the Board chair increases as the school size decreases. The study has found evidence to support this tentative theory in a number of areas. As school size decreases so does the pool of available trustees and the expertise available to the school in the area of governance. As school size decreases, the greater the time that the principal must spend in the classroom teaching and the less time they have for educational leadership therefore the more the Board chair does to support the principal. And, with the decrease in school size, there is a corresponding increase in the intimacy of interpersonal relations. Small schools seldom have experienced executive staff to provide administrative support therefore Board chairs take a greater 'hands on' role.

Similarly the more remote the school, the greater the need for support both for principals, who tend to be less experienced than their city counterparts, and for Board chairs. Sue spoke of the reluctance of her trustees to travel over an hour to the nearest town for trustee training and Board chairs all recognised the increased costs of being rural and remote. The implications of falling rolls in rural areas were causing concern to all the participants.

Overall, this study has highlighted the impact of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms on small rural schools and focussed attention on the role of the Board chair. It showed that the rural Board chair is often working under difficult circumstances to provide leadership while at the same time, attending to the challenging range of tasks required of the role. Several issues have emerged that warrant further study including the questions:

- Is the phenomenon of reluctant leadership widespread among Board chairs?
- How can Board chairs operate in a gemeinschaft way within a system that is increasingly gesselschaft driven ?

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Rotor streaming media software

John McMillan and Harry Jones
(RealNET Communications)

Abstract

This paper outlines briefly the functions of the Rotor system and its associated capabilities. During the presentation of the paper a live broadcast will be delivered from Melbourne.

The Rotor system is a synchronous and asynchronous delivery platform which enables live interactive streamed video and audio overlaid by a wide range of educational and interactive functionality.

Potential applications of our product in a corporate environment include:

- staff training, accreditation and professional development;
- staff information sessions;
- operational briefings;
- new product launches;
- meetings and conferences;
- senior executive market/media briefings; and
- live or archived broadcast of any live event.

One important benefit of the system is that it allows any organization to quickly produce (using only in-house resources) and disseminate information to a wide audience via their web site.

In the conference/meeting environment the product can improve the reach of the activity by enabling virtual (live and interactive) participation from around the world

The differentiators of this product include:

Reach

The system may be accessed by any participant with a normal computer via a standard telephone line at speeds as low as 26.4Kbs. At this bandwidth video is streamed at 8 frames per second (sufficient to provide lip synchronisation). Higher bandwidth can be utilised if desired with consequent increase in video quality (to TV quality). The system can also be deployed in, or associated with a LAN or WAN environment.

Synchronous and asynchronous

The one platform provides both live interactive sessions and with a couple of mouse clicks, archives the session to a web page where it can be viewed by interested persons (password controlled if desired) at a time and place of their choosing. Archived sessions may be controlled by the person accessing who may move through the video at their own pace, rewind, replay etc. Supporting training content such as slides are also selected by the viewer. Alternatively the archived session may be totally synchronised and made available to a passive viewing audience.

Hardware cost

The hardware infrastructure to broadcast a Rotor session may purchased for under $5 000.00

Scalability

The system is extremely scalable able to broadcast simultaneously to a few or to thousands of participants.

Connectivity

In a public telephone network environment the system can be broadcast over a single 64Kb ISDN

line to up to 50 simultaneous students or on a 128Kb ISDN to 400.

Remote camera

The system allows the introduction during any session of a remote video source from anywhere in the world. This feature facilitates the utilization of guest speakers or remote experts in any communication/training or conference event.

Training support material

A range of training/communication support material may be incorporated in presentations including power point slides, VHS video and material produced using proprietary software such as excel, word, corel draw etc.

Otitis media, learning and community (1)(2)

David McSwan, Emma Clinch and Ron Store
(James Cook University)

Abstract

This paper reviews selected literature relating to the medical condition and learning consequences of Otitis Media in Aboriginal children in remote communities and reports on a research project which aimed to develop a whole community approach to the problem. The model brings together health, education, medical professionals, paraprofessionals and the community in a structured and cohesive program based on the school as the lead and central agency. The special significance of community and paraprofessionals, for example teacher aides is considered.

Introduction

In March 2000 a United Nation's representative asked: "How is it that a country like Australia, with its resources, has not yet been able to bring what's less than two percent of the population up to reasonable levels in terms of living standards?" (Carruthers, 2000, p. 22)

> *Aborigines are likely to die up to 25 years earlier than other Australians; half of all Aboriginal men and four in ten women will die before they turn 50.*
>
> *Outside a war zone or famine conditions, Aborigines are the only group of people in the world whose life expectancy has not risen during the past 15 years.*
>
> *Aborigines have the highest rate of rheumatic fever in the world.*
>
> *Aboriginal babies are twice as likely as other babies to die at birth.*
>
> *Aboriginal women are four times more likely than other women to be hospitalised due to an injury.*
>
> *Treatable diseases such as trachoma (which can lead to blindness), glue ear (causing deafness in children), renal failure, heart disease and*

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(1) Contributions of the following people to various elements of the study are acknowledged : Ms D Ruddell, Project Officer; Ms Emma Clinch, teacher, Northern Territory Department of Education; Mr Ron Store, Consultant Evaluator, Townsville.

(2) Project funded by Queensland Health.

> *diabetes are rampant in many communities. Aborigines are up to 18 times more likely than other Australians to die of infectious diseases.*
> *Only 31 per cent of Aborigines continue education past secondary school.*
> *One in five prisoners is Aboriginal.*
> *About 50 per cent of Aborigines are totally dependent on welfare.*
> Source: Commonwealth Statistics, World Vision, in Carruthers, 2000, p. 2-4.

There are numerous and significant barriers to indigenous children in accessing both primary and secondary education in isolated areas. The following extract from the ATSIC submission (p.21) to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Rural and Remote Education Inquiry in 1999 outlined these barriers:

> *These barriers include the lack of relevance of the curriculum and education generally, racism and discrimination at all levels in society including the school environment and the classroom, poor health, lack of opportunity for the involvement of parents and community in school based delivery of education, levels of incarceration, unemployment, and availability of suitable teachers. These exacerbate the already poor quality or lack of availability of the physical school environment.*

ATSIC Commissioner David Curtis further adds that "… although these problems are faced by Indigenous peoples living in both rural and urban areas, it is the geographic isolation experienced by those living in rural areas that further compounds the situation" (Melbourne hearing, cited in Rural and Remote Education Inquiry, 2000). 31% of Indigenous Australians live in rural and remote areas compared to 14% of non-Indigenous Australians (DETYA and ATSIC submissions cited in Rural and Remote Education Inquiry, 2000). The DETYA submission further stated that approximately 35% of Indigenous primary students in urban areas had significantly lower literacy and numeracy achievement compared with approximately 43% in rural and remote areas (cited in Emerging Themes, 2000).

One of the most important barriers to educational participation and success faced by Indigenous people is the issue of ill health and its far reaching effects on their chances of educational success and subsequent life opportunities. Hearing health is a ke consideration for educationalists Otitis Media (OM) and associated Conductive Hearing Loss (CHL) impair learning.

What is otitis media?

Otitis Media is a generic term used to cover a range of middle ear problems. The tube connecting the nose/mouth area (outside air) and the middle ear is called the Eustachian Tube whose main function is ventilation, allowing air to move in and out of the middle ear space. If the tube becomes blocked, (a common cold or runny nose can cause this), bacteria can grow and cause an infection. The build up of infected fluid stops the eardrum from vibrating and carrying the vibration to the inner ear. This stage of the OM process is also known as 'glue ear'. The child may have associated pain, become hot and irritable and feel unwell, as well as having decreased hearing. The pus builds up behind the eardrum and as a result the drum may burst and pus drains out of the child's ears - Otitis Media with effusion.

Because the Eustachian tube is more horizontal in children, this makes it easier for it to become blocked. As the child grows the tube becomes more vertical and thus it is easier to drain naturally.

In Australia the most common method of treating OM is with antibiotics (Del Mar, 1994). However, this brings only short-term relief as no specific 'cure' has been found. For recurrent and persistent bouts of OM, grommets or ventilation tubes may need to be placed into the ear to assist with fluid draining.

Higgins (1994) reports that the exact cause of chronic ear disease is still unknown as no one virus, fungus or bacterium has been shown to be the culprit. As the old adage goes, 'Prevention is better than cure'. Kalokerinos stated in the Medical Journal of Australia, (1969, Vol.1,p.185 cited in Kalokerinos, 1998, para.8) "Find the answer to these ear infections and we will find the answer to everything."

Prevalence of otitis media

OM is one of the most common of childhood diseases. Up to 75% of all children will experience an ear infection, occurring mainly during infancy, but for some it may continue throughout school life (Prince, 1999). Although OM affects all cultural groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have an OM prevalence rate ten times that of Caucasian children (Foreman, 1987; Moran, et al., 1979; Price, 1999; Sherwood, 1993).

Many researchers have labelled Indigenous children as 'otitis prone' in the sense that they are subject to early onset and to a high prevalence of recurring Chronic OM (e.g., Mathews et al., 1992). It has also been noted that the observed pattern of OM in Australian Indigenous populations is different to that exhibited by affluent populations of the developed world, having more in common with the experience of disadvantaged populations (Gee et al., 2000).

It is the Indigenous communities in rural and remote areas that tend to suffer the highest rates of OM (Gee et.al., 2000). Although prevalence rates vary from community to community and from time to time, Kalokerinos states that figures "can be established as being between 20% and 100%" (1998, paragraph 6).

Nienhuys & Burnip (1988) have estimated that in Queensland, 30% - 80% of Indigenous school age children will suffer from hearing loss at any one time. Erber, (1985, cited in Nienhuys, 1992) described the effects of early OM and associated CHL in the developing child. He believes that this will threaten the development of the four levels of auditory function: detection skills, auditory discrimination skills, word identification skills and word comprehension.

Most children suffering from OM have mild to moderate hearing losses in that they fall into the 20-60 decibel range which represents an educationally significant problem (Prince, 1991). Riechman, William & Healy state that "low sound energy voiceless consonants such as *p,t,k,s,sh,th* and *f*; plural endings (e.g., *s* and *es*); and final position fricatives (e.g. wi*th*, wa*s*, wi*sh*, and ha*lf*), will be masked and probably won't be heard by children with a mild hearing loss of 20-30 dB in the average classroom which has a noise level of 40-50 dB" (1997). It is interesting to note that Indigenous children learning English, (typically the language of instruction in schools), often have difficulties with hearing these sounds anyway as they do not occur in some Indigenous languages (Lowell, 1990 in Price, 1993; Yonowitz et.al., 1995).

In Nienhuys' study on the effects of CHL on the Development of Indigenous children, he found that Indigenous children "may suffer hearing loss from very early infancy; hearing levels may not return to normal before adulthood since the disease seems to persist with poor treatment, and it is also likely to be fluctuating as the ear state changes between wet and dry perforations [of the eardrum] and OME [Otitis Media with effusion]" (1992, p. 6).

Because the condition is fluctuating, it can be present one day in a child and gone the next. "As many as eight out of ten children could have a middle ear infection and associated hearing loss at some time during the school year" (Price, 1999, p.4).

Research reviewed shows a clear link between OM and associated CHL to inhibiting auditory, communication and social development (in both the home and school language environments); behavioural difficulties and later academic achievement.

If children can't hear properly, they can't learn properly "... especially if they are learning a second, third or fourth language" (Price, 1999, p.4).

The study

In 1994 the Queensland Department of Health Golden Casket fund made $115 000 available to the Australian Rural Education Research Association Inc. (ARERA) to conduct research into educational and health strategies that could ameliorate the effects of Otitis Media in a remote community. Specifically, the project sought to investigate and then develop improved health practices related to Otitis Media and improved learning outcomes among the target group This project involving the Departments of Heath and Education commenced at a State School in western Queensland early in 1995 and was successfully completed in 1996.

In June 1996 the Rural Education Research and Development Centre (RERDC) received funding from the Queensland Health Promotion Council (QHPC) of

Queensland Health (QH) to conduct a further project. The project was to move from the research trial phase to a three-year program of implementation of successful practices suggested in the aforementioned project.

Objectives of the project were to:

1. reduce the incidence and effects of Otitis Media on people in two target communities;
2. raise community awareness of Otitis Media over a year, 1997;
3. raise teacher and child awareness of Otitis Media on children's learning;
4. improve learning outcomes of children who are suffering/have suffered Otitis Media;
5. have teachers develop strategies and materials to reduce effects of children's hearing loss;
6. empower students to exercise control over their learning;
7. embed appropriate practices in local communities; and
8. (included a 1999 revision of the project) produce a kit of learning materials and teacher resources for each school.

School sites

Using hearing health statistics, enrolment details and advice from health and education professionals three rural/remote schools were selected for the project. (Further details withheld in the interests of confidentiality.)

Implementation

The Project Officer carried out multiple visits to communities, schools and various health professionals. Particular attention was given to empowering the teacher aides in all the schools, the thought being that they remain in the school, are part of the community and function as bridges/links between the school and the parents and community, Workshops, staff seminars and social functions were held at all schools. Available teaching resources were acquired and supplied as kits to all schools. As well the Project Officer and teachers developed specific resources relevant to local needs and culture.

Evaluation methodology

Evaluating the outcomes of the project proved difficult for a variety of reasons:

1. There is a high rate of staff turnover in the schools involved and at least one changed significantly during the project in terms of student numbers and attendance. I was able to identify only one teacher who had been involved in the Otitis Media project and she had been associated with it for only one year. One teacher aide was identified as having been associated with the project and she provided some comments. All of the principals, save one, had moved to new appointments. New principals are not always briefed on past programs.

2. There are other organizations involved in seeking to ameliorate the impact of Otitis Media. Health workers who visit the school also implement strategies such as sound amplification systems. People working in the schools sometimes confuse one program with another

Questionnaires and interviews gathered information and opinion from persons involved in the implementation of the program in the schools. Phone interviews were conducted with the present and former principals and staff at the three schools. Personal interviews were also conducted with the Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, Townsville, and the Team Leader, Hearing Unit, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program. Comments have also been received from teacher aides at the schools. Questions asked of principals, teachers and teacher aides related directly to program objectives as outlined in the 1997 submission and subsequent amendments.

Results

Summary of comments

1. *Did you as a teacher of indigenous students become more aware and better informed of the effects of Otitis Media on students' learning and the need to develop appropriate practices as a result of this project?*

   Responses to this question were very positively 'Yes'. Principals involved in the program noted that it had increased their awareness of Otitis Media and used the strategies proposed by the program to help the children. A new principal suggested that the program would be more effective if he had received an induction to it.

2. *Were you, your teacher aides and health support staff able to involve the community in maintaining appropriate practices in children?*

   A former principal said that he had worked at trying to get the community to keep it going. The procedures suggested by the program (regular nose blowing, etc) were part of school procedures. One current principal said that he had not succeeded in maintaining community involvement. Community members would often say that child is 'pinnagarie' and considered unable to be helped. They could not see any connection to mainstream learning. Another principal suggested that she had been unable to maintain much community involvement.

3. *Was it possible to detect an improvement and reduction in Otitis Media in children and therefore an improvement in areas such as learning outcomes, truancy and classroom behaviour?*

   One principal commented that there was a reduction in Otitis Media when the simple breathe, blow, cough (BBC) routine is maintained. However, he did note that high teacher turnover (60% new staff each year) and lack of experienced teachers were always militating against maintenance of the program. Most of his teachers were first-year teachers and were in "survival mode" and unable to deal with other programs. Two other principals said that the program "would have helped but not in large percentages". In relation to truancy lots of other variables were involved and it was not possible to say that the Otitis Media program had any particular effect.

4. *Was there any evidence that the community was able to organize itself to deal with other health issues as a result of their involvement in the Otitis Media project, e.g., involvement of community health professionals? Has the school become more important in health care?*

   One principal commented that there was certainly a greater health awareness but that he believed it was a product of a variety of influences, including the Otitis Media project. A principal now no longer at the community but involved in the project from its inception stated that there was evidence to suggest that the community was able to organise itself more. Another principal was "not sure".

5. *The project prepared a resources kit for use in schools. Has this proved to be useful and does it continue to be used?*

   Because the resources kit was prepared and introduced following the revision of the project in 1999, there was no clear outcome suggested by principals and teachers. One person commented that it had been of use. Another noted that it would be of even greater use if one person (preferably a teacher aide) could take on responsibility for its use within the school. Indeed, one principal was seeking funding to employ a person whose responsibilities would include use of the resources kit.

An interview with the Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program, Townsville, confirmed the desirability of the project model; that is, an interdisciplinary approach to the problem, involving a partnership of Health and Educational professionals and agencies. He believes that such a partnership is essential. He commented that the appointment of a person to link these agencies may be necessary. Alternatively, he suggested that perhaps the school nurse may be able to take on this responsibility. Additionally, he believes that the parents and community need to be closely involved with any school-based program and that they need to "own" the program. He commented that he believed that the project suffered because of the time that elapsed between the visits of the Project Officer and confirmed that Otitis Media remains a problem in communities and does not seem to be improving.

Conclusion

In order to learn language, it is necessary to hear language. If a child is suffering a fluctuating conductive hearing loss during the critical period for language acquisition then this may cause learning difficulties, language delay and have long term social and educational effects. OM and associated CHL not only affect language learning at school, they can also affect learning of the home language.

Indigenous children living in remote areas have an alarmingly high rate of CHL due to chronic OM. Because of this, it is imperative that teachers of Indigenous children are trained and prepared to implement strategies to deal with the fact that eight out of ten children in their class will have an infection and hearing loss at some time during the school year.

Support needs to be provided from medical, audiological and educational perspectives.

Research confirms that any strategy which is to be successful should: be interdisciplinary; addressed in a culturally appropriate way; take into account Indigenous ways of thinking; be well planned and evaluated, and, most importantly, be embedded in community. It seems that after almost two decades of 'intervention' the levels of incidence remain the same. In previous years programs have failed because of their 'one way' approach to the giving and receiving of information rather than an exchange or sharing of knowledge between the community and the 'experts'.

Active involvement of all service providers, community and policy makers is the only way children with OM are to have the opportunity to realise their social and educational potential (Higgins, 1994).

It is clear from the comments received that the program has had an impact on the communities while it was implemented but that at the conclusion of the program with the rapid turnover of staff, gains noted during the project seem to have dwindled subsequently. The intervention of health staff and their programs has also caused some confusion for those working in the schools about who was responsible for what and what program had what effect.

All of this is not to deny the relevance or validity of the model/philosophy proposed by the program, namely, that the problem of Otitis Media is best addressed through involvement of the community and school in concert with health professionals.

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Quality VET provision in rural schools

Don Squires
(NSW Department of Education and Training)

Abstract

The workshop will enable participants to:

- identify components of a quality VET program for an isolated rural school and community
- evaluate current practices in the provision of VET in their community
- investigate some possible VET delivery models from the perspective of their own community
- develop the structure for a VET implementation plan for their school and community, based on quality considerations

1. Choosing the appropriate elements for a VET program
    - discussion of critical factors and elements
    - consideration of models in context of own school and community
    - describing what happens at the school at present in terms of the 5 models
2. Embedding the program in the community
    - assessing current practices
    - designing fresh strategies
3. Understanding who and what is involved in a VET program
    - what has to happen?
    - who are the players?
4. Putting together the appropriate delivery structures
    - what 'blend' of players is appropriate in this situation?
    - assessing the appropriateness of VET delivery models
5. Developing a VET implementation plan
    - strategies
    - actions
    - mechanisms
    - responsibility
    - timelines

Critical factors for the delivery of VET in remote and rural communities

- Use of culturally appropriate – and where possible, local – trainers
- Incorporation of vocational learning with accredited vocational education
- Use of appropriate distance and online learning
- Awareness in schools and their communities of their roles in successful vocational education initiatives
- Flexibility of programs and their ability to respond to local needs
- Professional development of teachers and their need to access information

Menu of elements of vocational education programs

- vocational learning
- accredited VET from institutional providers
- structured workplace learning
- accredited VET using local trainers or coordinators
- work experience
- enterprise-based education

Some models of vocational education across Australia

Combination of
- vocational learning
- accredited VET
- structured workplace learning

Vocational learning only

Accredited VET using local trainers/coordinators

Vocational learning with work experience in Yr 9, followed by post-compulsory VET

VET incorporating vocational learning with enterprise-based education

DETYA (2000) *Models of delivery of vocational education and training in schools in rural and remote areas*

Embedding your school's VET program in the community

RESEARCH YOUR LOCAL SITUATION

Talk as a school community: what do you want to achieve? Set your goals. Do this as a whole-of-school community. Don't limit this discussion to teachers

Identify the outcomes you want to achieve from a vocational education program. Do you want improved student understanding of productive activities in the community? Employment for students? Establishment of community enterprises?

Research and document all of the employment options in the community, including paid work, enterprise and community development activities.

IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Identify partnerships that can support local enterprise or vocational education initiatives and start planning some school activities around them. Discuss with community organizations existing, proposed and possible training, enterprise or community projects that will respond to local issues.

Start modestly: give yourself the opportunity to experience success.

Form a management committee representing industry and community organizations. Establish roles and responsibilities for each group involved.

DISCUSS YOUR PLANS WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Investigate what the community's perceptions of vocational education are. Ask your community what it needs from vocational education.

Find out who is planning training in the community: research and document this. Identify the industry areas and registered training organizations involved, both locally and those who visit.

Ensure your community supports your plans before taking action.

DOCUMENT YOUR PLANS, THE ISSUES YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED AND THE OUTCOMES

Develop and document a plan for your community-based vocational education program. Involve local organizations such as bank, local council or Chamber of Commerce to assist and act as 'critical friend'.

Develop a list of possible program options for vocational education that responds to the needs of local employers, trainers and community organizations. Document what support and resources are needed for each option.

COMMUNICATE AND SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS

Present your plan to the school, community stakeholders and other schools. Include all the agencies and organizations that will be involved.

Discuss the plan and possible implementation strategies, both within the community and your organization.

Identify funding sources. Begin the process of obtaining funding if it is required.

Market your plan and your program as it develops; continue to communicate its progress to all the stakeholders.

DETYA (2000) *Models of delivery of vocational education and training in schools in rural and remote areas: A handbook of case studies.* p6

A) Imagine starting with a clean sheet at your school		B) Reflecting on the current situation at your school	
If this were my goal …	**What would I need to do to implement it in my community?**	**What is already in place and working well?**	**What aspects need further development?**
RESEARCH YOUR LOCAL SITUATION Talk as a school community: what do you want to achieve? Set your goals. Do this as a whole-of-school community. Don't limit this discussion to teachers Identify the outcomes you want to achieve from a vocational education program. Do you want improved student understanding of productive activities in the community? Employment for students? Establishment of community enterprises? Research and document all of the employment options in the community, including paid work, enterprise and community development activities.			

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What has to happen?

1. supply of learning materials

2. teaching and support of student

3. practical work

4. arranging workplacement

3. supervising/monitoring workplacement

4. assessing competencies

5. RTO responsibility

6. support for teacher

7. everything else

Who are the players?

STUDENTS

SCHOOLS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

VET PROVIDERS

6. RTOs
7. TAFE
8. OTEN-DE
9. DISTANCE EDUCATION CENTRES
10. ON-LINE PROVIDERS

DISTRICTS

11. DVECs
12. T&D/CURRICULUM
13. CEOs

INSTITUTES

14. PMTVETs

WORKPLACE COORDINATORS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DELIVERING VET: EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE DELIVERY MODELS

School-delivered VET	*TAFE-delivered VET*	*School and TAFE share delivery*	*School and OTEN-DE share delivery*	*Delivery by a Distance Education Centre*
School: delivers course, develops own learning materials and program; sets all written assignments, marks work; gives feedback to and supports student; arranges practical components; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies. District is RTO. Funded from school resources. Teacher supported by school and District.	**TAFE college:** delivers course; develops own learning materials and program; sets all written assignments, marks work; gives feedback to and supports student; arranges practical components; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies. TAFE Institute is RTO. TVET funding model applies Teacher supported by TAFE	**School:** develops learning materials and program for, and teaches 'theoretical' modules; sets written assignments, marks work, gives feedback to and supports student; liaises with TAFE partner. **TAFE college:** arranges practical components; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies. TAFE Institute is RTO. 50% funded from school 50% attracts TVET funding Teachers supported by school, district and TAFE	**School:** delivers course; develops own learning materials and program using learning materials and resources purchased from OTEN-DE; sets all written assignments, marks work; gives feedback to and supports student; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies **OTEN-DE:** supplies learning materials and resources to teacher; OTEN-DE teacher supports local teacher using technologies. Funded from school resources District is RTO Teacher supported by school, district and OTEN-DE	**DEC:** delivers course; develops learning materials and program or uses OTEN-DE materials; supplies course materials to students by conventional means or on-line; sets all written assignments, marks work; gives feedback to and supports student; arranges practical components; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies in conjunction with employer. **School**: supervises student's work; liaises with DEC; supports student locally. RTO is DEC's district. DE funding model applies. Base school teacher supported by DEC, by district and by OTEN-DE

Delivery by two Distance Education Centres	*School and Distance Education Centre share delivery*	*School, Distance Education Centre and TAFE college share delivery*	*OTEN-DE and local TAFE college share delivery*	*Two or more schools collaborate to deliver a course ON-LINE*
DEC#1 and DEC#2: share development of learning materials and program (for specific units of competency as negotiated) or they use OTEN-DE materials; share delivery of course, by usual media or on-line, and set all written assignments, mark work; give feedback to and support student; arrange practical components; work on competence development; arrange workplacement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator and base school; supervise/monitor placement; assess competencies in conjunction with employer. **School:** supervises student's work; liaises with DECs; supports student locally. **RTO is shared by DEC's districts** DE funding model applies. Base school teachers supported by DECs, by districts and by OTEN-DE	**DEC:** teaches 'theoretical' modules; supplies learning materials, by usual media or on-line; sets written assignments, marks work, gives feedback to and supports student; **School:** supervises student's DE work; provides local support for student; liaises with DE teacher and DEC; arranges practical components; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator and school; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies RTO is school's district. 50% funded by school. DE funding model applies to 50% Teacher(s) supported by DEC, by district and by OTEN-DE	**DEC:** teaches some 'theoretical' modules (as negotiated); supplies learning materials, by usual media or on-line; sets written assignments, marks work; gives feedback to and supports student; liaises with TAFE college and school **TAFE college:** arranges practical components; works on competence development; liaises with school and DEC **School:** supervises student's DE work; provides local support for student; liaises with DE teacher and TAFE college; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator and school; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies RTO is school's district or TAFE TVET funding model applies to 33%; DE funding to 33%; school resources 33% Teachers supported by DEC, by district, by TAFE and by OTEN-DE	**OTEN-DE:** supplies learning materials and resources to TAFE teacher; OTEN teacher supports local teacher on phone, etc **TAFE college:** develops own learning materials and program; sets all written assignments, marks work; gives feedback to and supports student; arranges practical components; works on competence development; arranges work placement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator and school; supervises/monitors placement; assesses competencies. RTO is TAFE Institute TVET funding model applies Teacher supported by TAFE and by OTEN-DE	DELIVERING SCHOOL(S): **prepare learning materials and a learning program for on-line delivery; assemble resources; aggregate students in virtual classroom across schools; supply teacher time for local supervision and support of own students; train students and teachers in use of technologies as required; set all written assignments, mark work; give feedback to and support students; arrange practical components; work on competence development; arrange workplacement in conjunction with workplacement coordinator and base school;** RECEIVING SCHOOL(S): **supervise students' on-line work; provide local support for students; liaise with coordinating teacher; supervise/monitor workplacement; assess competencies.** **RTO is district.** **Staffing resources by negotiation.** **Teacher support by district and by OTEN-DE using technologies, if required**

Assessing the appropriateness of VET delivery models

Outcomes

What will this model allow us to achieve in this community?

To what extent will that satisfy the community's wants and needs?

Participants

Who will be the major players in this arrangement?

What precisely will be the role of each of these players?

What needs to be done to prepare and support these people for these roles?

Resourcing

What are the funding/resourcing implications of the model?

Is operation of the model dependent on access to new resources? If so, what steps need to be taken to secure these resources?

Operations

What are the likely impediments or sticking points in implementing the model?

What action can be taken to pre-empt any anticipated difficulties?

IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING SHEET

OUTCOME: ______________________________

rategies (What are we trying to achieve?)	Actions (What do we need to do?)	Mechanism (How best will the action be advanced?)	Responsibility (Who will lead the action?)	Time for completion

VET: This is how we do it in Burra

RJ [Gus] Wenzel
(Burra Community School)

Abstract

Burra Community School is a small R – 12 school located in the Lower North Education District of South Australia approximately 160 kms north of Adelaide. The school has offered VET curriculum opportunities to its Senior School students for about seven years in a variety of industry areas and formats. The town is located in an important merino breeding district of Australia and has a history rich in Australia's early mining industry. It has and continues to develop a strong tourism industry and is a service centre for the surrounding rural area. Consequently Tourism, Retail, Hospitality and Agriculture feature strongly in the VET offerings. The focus of this workshop will be on how we attempt to provide a balance in the Senior School VET and general curriculum by providing maximum opportunity to each of the Senior School students for their future livelihood.

The school

Burra Community School is a small R-12 school in the Lower North Education District in South Australia.

- The school consists of three sub schools: a Junior School [Reception to Year 5] consisting of four classes with 86 students; a Middle School [Year 6 to Year 9] consisting of five classes with 116 students; and a Senior School [Year 10 to Year 12] consisting of the three levels with 57 students. The total enrolment is 259
- Burra Community School was established in 1978 after the Primary School and High School took up a government offer to combine and redevelop into what was to be South Australia's first Community School.
- Community status of the school comes from the shared community facilities of a library, gymnasium, grounds, swimming pool, computer and other specialist teaching areas.
- In 1993 a boarding facility was developed in the old nurses quarters at the Burra Hospital. This attracts students from pastoral and northern settlements that do not offer secondary education opportunities.
- In 1996 the school purchased a 170 hectare farm property which is called Brewery Hill.

- In 1999 Telstra erected a mobile phone tower on Brewery Hill which gave us an excellent opportunity to repair and develop the farm fences, yards etc.

Burra: The town and community

Burra is located 160 Km north of Adelaide on the Barrier Highway which links Adelaide and Broken Hill. The population of the town is approximately 1 000 while the district population is about 1 750. It is one of South Australia's oldest towns and at one time was the largest town outside of Adelaide. Burra in fact saved South Australia from bankruptcy due to the richness of the copper mine that gave the town its history. Its heritage is in mining and the town is heritage listed with many sights and remnants of the mining days still evident. The features of the town and community that are relevant to this discussion include:

- The town is a retail centre for the surrounding district.
- Tourism is an important, established and developing industry in the town.
- Adchem is a chemical company producing cupric oxide and is a major employer in the town.
- Burra has been proclaimed as the "Merino Capital of the World" because of the high intensity of sheep studs in the district producing merino breeding stock for Australia / the world.
- The Regional Council of Goyder has its headquarters in Burra.
- To the south of Burra is the famous Barossa Valley, to the west the Clare Valley both extremely wealthy wine regions of South Australia. To the east is pastoral country with large sheep stations that form a vital part of the sheep industry.

VET implementation at Burra community school

Burra Community School has been involved in VET curriculum offerings since 1993 when the school was successful in being selected to trial a retail studies curriculum program targeted at rural and isolated children. A requirement of the trial was to industry train myself, as the teacher, through Retail Training SA. This training accredited me to deliver what were then retail modules that enabled students to partially complete a retail traineeship in a semester at stage one level of our SACE [South Australian Certificate of Education]. A major focus of the course was the work placement component that extended the concept of work experience to workplace training.

The idea of offering such a course appealed to the school as we were beginning to grapple with alternative curriculum offerings at Senior School level. The advantages included:

- offering a choice to students from which they recognized positive outcomes for themselves;
- offering a choice that provided a real link between school and work;
- providing an opportunity to perhaps keep our children in their town for a period after leaving school; and
- working with the local community in establishing workplace opportunities.

Since that trial, VET curriculum has developed quite significantly with the introduction of new areas such as Tourism, Hospitality, Agriculture and general Work Education. To meet the requirements to offer VET curriculum funds were made available for schools to develop courses, train teachers in industry areas and as workplace assessors. Since that first trial BCS has offered VET to all students in our Senior Secondary cohort. In the Senior School we offer a compulsory curriculum to all of our year tens [currently 18 and it varies to about a maximum of 25]. Our SACE cohort of year eleven [22 students in 2001], year twelve [14 students in 2001] and year thirteen [2 students in 2001] is about average numbers for us. All SACE students have had and do have the opportunity to opt into VET offerings as part of their programs.

In fact our philosophy is to tailor each senior school student [Stage I and II] with a personal study program that best meets his or her needs. Each personal study program is developed by keeping as many options open as possible for the student. To be able to do this we have had to be creative with time tabling and have the cooperation of all staff to be flexible. We use the Open Access College and other providers to complement the curriculum areas that we are unable to deliver.

VET curriculum offered at Burra:

- TOURISM: Offered as a SACE Stage I unit. There is no requirement from the Australian Tourism Training Review Panel for students to attend a work placement but as part of the course students are placed at the Burra Visitor Centre for three to five days. This placement must include some out of hours time [weekends or holiday]. The course is primarily offered in semester one when the tourism industry is busier over the Easter / autumn school vacation. The content of the course uses the local tourism industry as a resource. On successful completion students gain both SACE and TAFE accreditation.
- RETAIL: Offered as a SACE Stage I unit. A requirement of this course is to complete at least five days of work placement. Students are generally placed locally and the workplace supervisor and myself [as the program coordinator] jointly perform workplace assessment. We have been involved in the TRAC program before but have found that our students tend to be more interested in the one semester approach. Students gain both SACE and industry accreditation.
- BUSINESS: Offered as a Stage I unit. There is no work placement as a requirement of this course and TAFE require some accreditation process to deliver the Office Administration Training Package This is not currently held by a teacher in the school. However Business Studies is a popular Stage II subject and so we offer a modified Stage I course based on some of the Administration units and students are encouraged to spend three to five days in an ‘office’ environment of which the school can be used. Students only gain SACE accreditation for this unit and receive a certificate of involvement in a school to work program for personal profiles.
- HOSPITALITY: Units of competence from the Certificate in Hospitality are offered in a very flexible manner. There is no workplace requirement but the students experience a range of practical events and activities to assess their competency in a variety of activities. Having a strong Tourism industry students make valuable use of the local area visiting many ‘hospitality’ establishments. Students put their skills to work in catering for many in school and community events. On successful completion students gain both SACE and TAFE accreditation.

- AGRICULTURE: As part of year ten, Stage I and Stage II students have been involved in a range of agricultural skills which have been embedded into the relevant courses. Because of the vast range of skills that could be included and the dynamic nature of the curriculum that can be seasonal and farm development based there is no set offering.
- ENTERPRISE: As a replacement of the Farm Skills program at year ten agriculture students are heavily involved in enterprise activities which is now a strong component of VET curriculum offerings. Students negotiate with the teacher an enterprise that they then go about operating. They prepare a business plan, run their enterprise keeping a journal, preparing a research report and presenting to the teacher. Enterprising skills are accredited to the student.
- WORK EDUCATION: As an introduction to SACE and VET curriculum all year ten students undertake a general Work Education unit. In this unit students investigate the world of work, employment opportunities, jobs and this year will be completing a new certificate course from our local TAFE titled, 'Employment Skills'. Students also attend a workplace of their choice to experience the world of work first hand. On successful completion students gain both SACE and TAFE accreditation.
- COMMUNITY STUDIES: Offered this year to further emphasize the individual student program, approach Community Studies gave another dimension to students involved in 'VET' style curriculum. Students are involved in the community by negotiating individual programs with a focus on one of the following areas, Arts, Work, Business, Mathematics, Design and Construction, Foods, Health and Recreation, Science and Technology. Students display skills of being enterprising, focussing on key competencies and essential learnings. On successful completion students gain SACE accreditation and receive community support and enthusiasm during their program.
- COMMERCIAL COOKERY: A cluster-linked school developed a 'Certificate in Commercial Cookery' course that was offered to students from cluster schools. One of our students who displayed a real interest in this field during her Stage I studies by completing Hospitality and Community Studies units enrolled and now travels one day a week to that school for intensive training.

- VOCATIONAL STUDIES: A Stage II SACE subject that allows an enormous amount of flexibility to students to pursue an industry based certificate course or competencies while also gaining SACE accreditation. Students must be enrolled in a 'Certificate Course' and participate in workplace training and all SACE work is focussed on their industry area.

VET operations

The operation of VET curriculum has grown from that first retail trial to a much broader curriculum area that has essentially focussed on student need and developed from teacher, school and community enthusiasm.

- Senior School Management has been supportive of any VET initiatives. Resourcing funds, supporting teacher training, accepting timetable variations, supporting workplace training and developing VET curriculums have been some of the challenges that have come with the implementation of VET curriculum. None however have created issues within the school which have challenged the implementation and growth of VET curriculum.
- VET implementation, management and administration within the community has fallen almost entirely onto the school due mainly to the small business like nature of the town. Time and personnel factors are the two main reasons that make involvement by local industry difficult. Even the larger employers find time difficult to spend in the management and implementation process. However as far as work placement is concerned then businesses have been more than cooperative. They see the program as an opportunity to consider future employment options. Business is happy to have students placed with them, assist in their training, work cooperatively in their assessment but have all the administration left up to the education sector [school]. They have been supportive of information sessions and meetings [breakfast meetings in particular] but as far as the coordination and organization of the program then the workload falls onto the school. This has not hindered the program to any degree.
- The Lower North Secondary Schools VET consists of ourselves and three nearby Secondary schools, each with significantly greater numbers than Burra. However we have a very strong collegiate network and much of our professional development in VET is coordinated through this cluster. A part time district VET

Coordinator supports professional links between the schools and liaises closely with the local TAFE campus. A long history of strong links between the schools has supported VET development to the stage it is today. The other schools in our cluster have groups and classes involved in pathway programs and other VET curriculum areas and they provide extra opportunities to Burra students [eg. Commercial Cookery]. It is a vision of the cluster to have the schools linked visually as well as by audio. This we believe will allow schools to link into each other and to become specialist schools in curriculum areas which then could have students from each of the four schools attending classes by video links, e.g. Burra may offer Tourism Studies, Clare Viticulture, Balaklava Hospitality and Riverton Retail.

- District VET committees have been established to manage the district strategic EVE [Enterprise and Vocational Education Plan] and are coordinated by the District VET coordinator. They include:
  - Vocational Education and Training in Schools Committee. The role of this group is to:
    - coordinate and manage existing VET arrangements;
    - expand VET offerings in our schools;
    - oversee structured workplace learning; and
    - increase the number of school based apprenticeships.
  - The Vocational Learning Committee. This group includes primary school representation. The role of this group is to:
    - develop, promote and support the implementation of Vocational Learning with a focus on the world of work and Enterprise Education;
    - coordinate a T & D opportunity for teachers in our schools to showcase the many aspects of Vocational Learning;
    - coordinate a Rural Enterprise Fair to share our successes and strengthen our links with the wider community;
    - set up a process for the implementation for the new Transition Portfolios; and
    - link Vocational Learning with the SACSA Frameworks.
  - The Enterprise Initiative Committee. The role of this group is:

    - to facilitate community participation environmental and social sustainable enterprises. The two projects are:
      a. Renewable Energy Systems: Solar power, wind power, biofuels; and
      b. Sustainable Agriculture: Viticulture, winemaking, land and water management and farm forestry
  - Local Career Service Providers and Integrated and Coordinated Support Services Committee. The role of this group is to:
    - support students in career advise, guidance and preparation for the transition from school to work; and
    - support secondary students with literacy and communication barriers and disabilities in career education and workplace learning.
- Teacher accreditation to enable VET curriculum is supported in the school. Teachers have been given time and costs for training have come from DETE initiative grants.
- Auspicing or Memorandum of Agreements is the quality control required by RTO's to ensure that curriculum standards are maintained. A sound collaborative working relationship exists between the local TAFE Campus and the school to write and ensure the quality control process. The agreements essentially focus on teacher accreditation, course materials, facilities and assessment processes.
- The key competencies are seen to be an important curriculum link in the preparation of students for the world of work. Competencies are included in many curriculum areas and certificates are presented to students who have achieved in the competencies.
- A current curriculum initiative in South Australia is the implementation of the SACSA Frameworks [South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework]. This is a new curriculum document for South Australian Schools, which addresses all areas of the curriculum and will have implications for Vocational Learning. A major thread through the Framework is the 'Essential Learnings' which are understandings, dispositions and capabilities that are developed through learning. These 'Learnings' are Futures, Identity. Interdependence, Thinking and Communication. They are seen to be learnings that are drawn upon throughout life and enable people to productively engage in their

future livelihoods. Our current challenge is to adapt, adopt or change our current curriculum processes and offerings to fit to the new framework.

Future developments

- Graphic Arts, with the possible opportunity of sign writing and ticket writing for local business.
- Lab Operations with structured work placement at Adchem, a chemical processing plant, which has an industrial laboratory
- Information Technology, with the Regional Council of Goyder, the hospital, school and small business offering work placements.
- Community Services, with the local preschool centre, hospital, day care centre and other volunteer organizations offering workplace opportunities.
- Investigations of the benefits of incorporating year 10 students into an ungraded Senior School timetable that could create further flexibility and greater opportunity for pathway development for our students. Currently many programs are at risk because of student numbers due to the size of the student cohort at Stage I and II. If the cohort is increased then maybe a more extensive and intensive curriculum base can be offered in both the VET and general curriculum.
- Continued investigation into the visual linking of the secondary schools within the cluster.

VET outcomes

Positive

- Students employed in the local community has been the major positive outcome of the implementation of the VET curriculum offerings. Tourism, Retail, Business and Hospitality are the main areas where employment has been gained. Real kids getting real jobs and being able to stay at home in their family environments for their first years of work.
- Employers have offered employment opportunities to students and supported students to continue with and complete their studies as Trainees.
- The exciting nature of VET curriculum that brings school and work closer together and in our case community as well.

- The training industry that has created opportunities for professional development in VET areas.
- The support and collegiate development that has come from our cluster partners and district coordinator.
- Funding available to investigate and develop courses.
- There have been no costs to students except for hardware they may wish to purchase. The school has been able to fund student involvement in all programs.

Negative

- Students who opt into the programs because it seen to be the "better of two evils". However these are rare and are not engaged in work place opportunities that would put the program at risk.
- Keeping up with the speed and intensity of the changes and developments that are occurring in the VET sector.
- Encouraging teachers to extend their comfort zones and "have a go" at VET curriculum.
- Cost for delivery of some curriculum areas by some RTO's.
- Meetings, bloody meetings. Due to the nature of our small school where we have many single teacher faculties attendance at local VET cluster meetings as outlined above becomes the responsibility of one person .

Small schools face the challenge - A case study of a group of small rural schools in New Zealand

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Abstract

Small rural schools have always had an important place in the educational life of New Zealand. For some years they have face a number of new challenges. These challenges include the impact of education reforms commenced in 1989; the depopulation of rural areas; difficulty in attracting and retaining high quality teachers and the changing expectations of parents. This case study seeks to provide a brief picture of a group of small schools in one isolated area of New Zealand and to examine the way that they have sought to meet the challenges. Key issues addressed in this paper include the approach to governance and management in these small schools and the effect of falling rolls. The way that teacher shortages have impacted on schools and the way that parents in small rural communities have responded to increased involvement in the education of their children are also discussed.

Introduction

Just as small rural schools have always had an important place in the educational life of Australian communities, the same applies in New Zealand. Yet staffing New Zealand rural schools has always been a challenge. Whereas policies of the past meant that many New Zealand teachers spent at least part of their teaching lives in these small schools, for some years now, a number of new challenges have emerged. They include difficulty in attracting and retaining high quality teachers and the changing expectations of parents, the impact on schools of depopulation of rural areas and the impact of education reforms commenced in 1989.

This case study seeks to provide a brief picture of a group of small schools in one isolated area of New Zealand and to examine the way that they have sought to meet the challenges of governance and management and of teaching and learning. This paper includes a description of a feasibility study, which sought to find a different approach to governance and management in these small schools. The study was prompted by concerns about the quality of schooling, the frequent turnover of principals and teachers and the difficulty of maintaining an effective board of trustees in each school. It led to the notion of having one principal and one board of trustees for a group of small schools rather than one board for every school.

Background

With a scattered rural population, New Zealand has always had a large number of small rural schools. Many of these are one to five or six teacher schools with up to about 150 students. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was estimated that about 65% of the total number of schools in New Zealand were one or two teacher schools. As rural areas have depopulated because of a change in farming patterns, a large number of these small schools have closed. Consequently, the percentage of one or two teacher schools has decreased. Of the 2 044 Full Primary and Contributing schools open in New Zealand at the end of 1999, 902 were schools with less than six teachers, (44%). Of these, 424 were one or two teacher schools constituting 21% of all primary and secondary schools, a significant proportion. The trend of small schools closing or amalgamating has continued, especially since the introduction of education reforms in 1989 and is likely to do so even further, as school communities examine how they can best provide quality education for their children.

There were six schools involved in this feasibility study are located on the East Coast of New Zealand. They are one or two teacher schools with rolls ranging from seven students to 43 students. Four of the schools have a staffing entitlement of one teacher equivalent; the remaining two have entitlement to two teachers. All schools have long histories, at least by New Zealand standards. They were established as follows:

School A was established in 1918 with a roll of 16 students. In 1986 it had 27 students and at the end of 2000 had seven students.

School B was established in 1929 with a roll of 11 students. In 1986 it had 23 students and seven students at the end of 2000.

School C was established in 1925 with a roll of nine students and 31 students in 1986. At the end of 2000, seven students were enrolled.

School D was established in 1919 with a roll of 15 students. It had 24 students in 1986 and 27 students at the end of 2000.

School E was established in 1929 with a roll of 36. In 1986 there were 53 students enrolled and in 2000, 43 students were enrolled.

School F was established in 1928 with 9 students. It had 10 students enrolled in 1986 and at the end of 2000 6 students were enrolled (Mathews, 1986).

The fact that they all have such long histories means they are all likely to be or have been integral parts of their communities. It is significant that the schools were all established within a few years. Most began with the growth of farming although one school was directly influenced by the development of a number of small, hydro-electric power schemes. When these schools were established after the First World War, farming became both more intensive as small blocks for returned servicemen were established and extensive and as large tracts of land were broken in for pastoral agriculture. The current rolls of these small schools vary little from when they were established. When the schools were established, a small roll was not considered an issue because of the inaccessibility of the schools. Now the small roll numbers are a continuing source of concern for education authorities and local community members over educational and economic viability.

The issues

There are three issues central to the way these small schools operate. They are the difficulty in providing strong governance; the difficulty in attracting and retaining effective principals and teachers; and the need to ensure that learning quality is of a high standard. They form the basis of the concerns that have been expressed by and to education authorities and to local community members. These need to be explained before detailing the direction of the feasibility study.

Governance

Prior to 1989 governance of all schools was through a regional education board. In the case of the schools in this case study, the education board was located in a larger town almost 150 kilometres away. Each school had an elected school committee of between five and nine members depending on the size of the school. School committees had limited powers but were the main source of local involvement. They spent allocated government monies and carried out minor maintenance. They had little direct control over long term planning and almost no involvement with the appointment of principals and teachers and curriculum.

In 1989 all New Zealand schools became 'self-managing'. This was a result of a worldwide trend to devolution of school governance responsibility. New Zealand moved more quickly and, at the time, more expansively than most other countries that devolved educational administration. The move to 'self-management' was intended to provide greater local involvement in governance and management. Each New Zealand school is now governed by a board of trustees that has legal responsibilities to the government, mainly through the Ministry of Education and Education Review Office. Boards of Trustees are responsible for a wide range of tasks, which are detailed as the National Education Goals. The particular responsibilities of Boards of Trustees are encapsulated in the National Administration Guidelines (Appendix 1) and require schools to take a much more significant part in education in their local communities compared with the old school committees. Governance of schools is the responsibility of each school's board, while the management of each school is the responsibility of the principal. Schools in small communities, like those of this case study, have had considerable difficulty in finding people who are able to provide strong and continuing governance and management for each school.

The need for greater input by school communities has led to a range of responses. For a significant number of small schools, the result of 'self-management' has been mixed. While the opportunity for greater involvement does bring some advantages, the schools in this study have not found it easy to find people who are willing and able to give the commitment of continuing time and energy to their local school. The school communities are often so small that it requires almost each and every family to be represented on a school board of five members and frequent changes of personnel are common. While the government has relaxed the requirement for boards to consist of at least five members, it has been difficult for some schools to find even the minimum of three members. Some New Zealand schools have gained much from self-management but it has tended to be in the larger and more affluent schools where the opportunity for greater local involvement has brought great impetus to the life and work of these schools. It generally has not been in schools located in lower socioeconomic and rural areas as in the schools in this study.

> *Low-decile and high-Maori-enrolment schools are more likely to have gained least from the reforms, and may have even gone backwards, suffering falling rolls at a time when primary rolls were generally rising*

> *(although not in all regions), carrying additional administrative costs and - although in receipt of additional funding from government-drawing on fewer voluntary resources, and continuing to have power parental involvement* (Wylie, 1999).

A second difficulty of governance is the continuing need for training of school trustees. A high turnover of trustees is a feature of governance in these small schools and the need for training of trustees is constant. A clear message from trustees is that they want to be equipped to do the job well and that they need training to do that. With a frequent turnover of trustees the need for that continuing training is obvious. It is a difficult task, and the small communities of this case study have found it very challenging to provide and maintain an effective board of trustees. The trustees need training in matters of education law, employment issues, property and matters that relate to management and curriculum. Simply getting enough people to form and maintain a board is difficult enough without the added need to be constantly teaching new skills and knowledge to new members.

Retention of teachers

A major teacher shortage in many New Zealand rural areas in 1995 and 1996 had particular impact on the rural schools in the case study. At that time most rural schools found it difficult to attract and retain teachers who would provide quality education. Some of this effect has been a historical one since the removal of the country service bar, a scheme which required teachers to serve three years in specified schools before they could achieve salary increases or promotion to positions of responsibility. It was abolished in the late 1970s, and coupled with the change to self-management has probably contributed to the difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers to rural positions. Teachers may not see the opportunity for promotion to be as rewarding as it could be in urban areas. Combined with that is a perception that pressures of being a rural teacher and principal are now much greater than they used to be. This is because of increased an increased administrative workload and concerns that the expectations of school communities are now more apparent than prior to the move to self-management in 1989. The turnover of principals has been a significant factor. In the last five years all schools in the study have had some changes. Schools A and B have both had four principal appointments including one as an Emergency

Staffing Support (ESS); Schools C, D, E and F have had three principal appointments. Two other schools not included in the study but located nearby have had three and six principal appointments, respectively.

Quality of learning

One effect of the difficulty in attracting and retaining principals and teachers in small rural schools has been questions about the quality of education, by the Education Review Office, the New Zealand school audit agency. All New Zealand schools are subject to review every three years. Each school is reviewed against the New Zealand Education Guidelines for curriculum and management matters. When the Review Office deems that a school does not meet requirements they are able to then make a Discretionary Review which gives a short period of time, usually three or six months, for the school to meet requirements. Three of the six schools in the case study have been subject to Discretionary Reviews in recent years. The areas of concerns for the Education Review Office have been with teaching and learning matters, governance and the turnover of principals. As was stated earlier all schools in the study have suffered from a high turnover of principals. Unfortunately, one of the main effects has been on the quality of learning for students. The Education Review Office commented on one school in the following way:

> *Students at X School do not receive a balanced curriculum. The provision of high quality learning opportunities for students is dependent on improving the performance of the teaching principal. Until this happens the quality of education remains at risk. The principal is in the early stages of a teaching career and has prioritised classroom management as being the focus area for development. However, the principal's knowledge of national curriculum requirements is limited and the principal has not yet developed the skills necessary for effective multi-level classroom teaching. Programmes of work do not meet the requirements of National Administration Guideline 1. As a consequence, students are not receiving the quality of education to which they are entitled.*

This is indicative of the situation in some of the schools, and serves to emphasise the effects of staffing difficulties.

The study

With this background to the situation in the small schools of the study, the University of Waikato was contracted to investigate the feasibility of implementing the notion of a 'roving principal'. The aims of the study were:

- *to obtain an initial consensus among the schools on a preferred option/options for shared governance/management arrangement;*
- *to develop model/models that are likely to be accessible to the schools and the Ministry of Education for shared governance/ management arrangements for the schools; and*
- *to achieve agreement between the schools and the Ministry of Education for a model of shared governance/management.*

A study team of five people undertook the study. Four were University staff members and the fifth was a local community member who had been a teacher in two of the local schools. Her contribution was as a team member and as a local link. The study was conducted over a period of eight weeks and required us to consult with a range of people and organisations. The timeframe was limited and placed some constraints but it did ensure there was a strong focus.

Prior to this study being undertaken the Ministry of Education had taken some action on the situation. The first of these actions was the appointment of a Schools Executive Administrator (SEA) to serve the six schools in what was termed as the 'cluster'. This appointment was for three years and was commenced in 1998. The SEA was to assist the schools in their administration looking particularly to focus on eliminating duplication of tasks. Then the Ministry asked an independent consultant to review the success of this appointment. This was done in early 2000. One of the recommendations of this report was that a feasibility study should be conducted to examine the possibility of shared governance / management functions between schools.

The study team initially consulted each school community. This was done through a visit to each school and then with a local community meeting. At these meetings, community members were asked the following questions:

1. What things about the current scene with the administrator in place do you thin k are working well.
2. What are the curriculum strengths in your school?
3. What gives your school its particular identity?
4. If you had a crystal ball what would you want to change about the way your school works now?
5. If you had a crystal ball what aspects of children's learning would you like to be focussed on over a five-year period?
6. Looking ahead at the learning needs of your children, what changes in the organisation and operation of the cluster would best help your children?
7. What do you think technology would do for the working of your school?
8. What are some possibilities for changes in the way that principal's work and the way that the Boards work?
9. With the final question some possible ideas were floated to initiate discussion. These were:
    - A clustered board of trustees with a representative from each community. This Board of Trustees would deal with a site committee based group in each school sharing the local needs with the site-based board.
    - A clustered Board of Trustees appointed on the basis of particular expertise that would deal with a site-based group in each school sharing the local needs with the site-based board.
    - A 'shared' principal.
    - The status quo with the Schools Executive Administrator.
    - The status quo before the Schools Executive Administrator.

The community meetings were all well attended which highlighted the amount of interest generated by the proposals. In some cases the meetings were representative of the whole community - members with no children at school yet to those whose children were well through compulsory schooling. As might be expected, responses varied a great deal. In questions 1 - 7 community members were very focussed on their own schools and clearly indicated not only their interest in the school, but also a clear desire to keep their own local school. They made comments that suggested they valued their schools as community centres, as places with excellent resources and institutions that had strong histories and which enjoyed excellent support from local communities. They were strong in their view that schooling through correspondence was not an option for their children and they could see that the use of Information

Communication Technology would be an advantage. The community members had no real view on how this might happen, although that was not surprising to the study team, as it is hard to envisage something for which one has no background.

Question 8 generated much discussion and very quickly became the central issue, which was significant in reaching the goal of the study. The study team collated the responses for each aspect of the ideas and reported on the advantages and disadvantages. When considering the advantages of school, which would function with a Board of Trustees comprising a representative form each community, responses focussed on logistics, management of the workload, collaboration and accountability. The community members suggested they could see this option possibly reducing isolation; help share the governance load; could deal with finance, property, health and safety, review and legislative issues; could provide efficiency and economy of scale; and could provide a greater pool of skilled people. They also considered there could be opportunities for collaboration through schools sharing common problems, up-to-date information and communication in general. They suggested that this option could lead to less local conflict and might assist in providing greater accountability.

When responding to the disadvantages of working with one Board of Trustees, community members saw a loss of identity as a major factor. Representative of their comments were statements such as

- *We would be looking after six schools rather than our own.*
- *We don't want to get bogged down with other schools problems.*
- *Each community is different.*
- *It could lead to a loss of local control and identity.*
- *There is a possibility of domination by people or communities. (Couch, Harold, McCarthy, Martin & Yates, 2000, p. 3)*

Community members also saw difficulty with such an idea because of travel distance, financial considerations and equality of representation.

The same arguments for and against were apparent when community members responded to the idea of retaining their existing governance arrangement or moving to a board of Trustees which would be appointed on the basis of expertise rather than an elected board.

The issue of having a principal who would serve all six schools became the major issue. In the process of discussion community members became reassured that the feasibility study was not about closing their schools. The focus did become clearer and they did appear to accept the concept of a shared principal. It was interesting that the term ‘roving principal’ was quickly rejected. Community members, principals and teachers did not think that such a term fitted what they were looking at and were more comfortable with 'shared principal' as a term.

The discussion of a shared principal focussed on advantages and disadvantages of having a "shared principal". The advantages included the way such an approach would help provide assistance for less experienced principals and teachers; assist in the provision of professional development; lighten principals' workloads; assist with day to day management; help coordinate planning; provide a greater focus on educational outcomes; assist with a greater emphasis on technology; "free" the principal to give more teaching time.

The disadvantages were raised and represented the way each community felt about their school and its identity. The issues included the consideration that an educational leader would not take a great deal of responsibility off the site manager, the possibility of one school requiring more time than their share and the thought that it could be difficult for a "shared principal" to have a close knowledge of each community. In addition, the view was expressed that such a possibility could be a threat to the career paths of current principals especially if they were performing well.

The study required extensive consultation with each community and parties who were likely to be affected by such a possibility. Among the groups consulted were the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Educational Institute. The Ministry were consulted to clarify legal issues and NZEI for industrial issues.

Following consultation the study team presented a report to community members, principals and teachers that indicated that the notion of having an executive principal and one board to serve six schools was possible. It would achieve the required outcome of investigating shared governance / management. The schools have accepted the idea and further discussion has continued throughout the first part of 2001.

Conclusions

Small schools such as those in the study outlined face and will continue to face difficulties of governance and management. The study found that such an idea is legally, financially and professionally possible. Whether it actually happens depends on a number of factors. First of these is that the communities involved will need to resolve the extent to which they wish to retain their direct involvement in their schools. If they are prepared to share the load of governance, there are likely benefits in a balancing of workload and in the retention of expertise in boards of trustees. With a possible board of trustees being 12 members as opposed to 30 for separate boards there is the potential for greater stability in the board. It would not place the same pressure on each school community to provide separate boards but such a framework would allow for local involvement such as previously existed under the earlier school committee arrangement.

The second factor is that the principals and teachers will need to be convinced of the merits of such a proposal. They will need to be assured that having one principal in an executive role would not be detrimental to the operation of each school. While transitional arrangements would need to be made for current principals as a safeguard, it does seem likely that the creation of a 'shared' principalship would offer benefits. These include the creation of a promotion step that should attract applicants of high quality and experience who would be able to take a strong professional leadership role. Appropriately remunerated, such a person would be likely to have the breadth and depth of curriculum and administration to offer a coordinated approach to a group of at least four schools. It could provide the opportunity for a 'shared' principal to ensure that much of the strategic planning for the schools is done in a coordinated way. It would also help in allowing teachers in each of the small schools to concentrate on classroom teaching and free them from much of the wider administration that appears to have enveloped many rural teachers.

The opportunity for a shared principal to operate in this way is likely to provide for professional development for both the 'shared' principal and the teachers in each of the school. One of the difficulties faced by all rural schools is continuing professional development in an accessible form. The opportunity to use online approaches is being investigated but the day to day supplementing of this would assist all teachers in these rural schools. This, in turn, would be likely to lead to an improvement in the learning climate for students in these small rural schools.

The feasibility study completed by the University of Waikato has looked at the possibility of shared governance / management in this group of six small rural schools. There are no legal impediments but the industrial; community and professional view may have a significant bearing on whether the approach is implemented in the near future.

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Appendix A The National Administration Guidelines

(As amended by notice published in the New Zealand Gazette, 25/11/99)

NAG 1 (revised)
Each Board of Trustees is required to foster student achievement by providing teaching and learning programmes which incorporate the New Zealand Curriculum (essential learning areas, essential skills and attitudes and values) as expressed in National Curriculum Statements.
Each Board, through the principal and staff is required to:
i. develop and implement teaching and learning programmes:
a. to provide all students in years 1-10 with opportunities to achieve for success in all the essential learning and skill areas of the New Zealand curriculum;
b. giving priority to student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in years 1-4;
ii. through a range of assessment practices, gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable the progress and achievement of students to be evaluated; giving priority first to:
a. student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in years 1-4; and then to:
b. breadth and depth of learning related to the needs, abilities and interests of students, the nature of the school's curriculum, and the scope of the New Zealand curriculum (as expressed in the National Curriculum Statements);
iii. on the basis of good quality assessment information, identify students and groups of students;
a. who are not achieving;
b. who are at risk of not achieving;
c. who have special needs; and
d. aspects of the curriculum which require particular attention;
iv. develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of students and aspects of the curriculum identified in **iii** above;
v. in consultation with the school's Maori community, develop and make known to the school's community policies, plans and targets for improving the achievement of Maori students;
vi. provide appropriate career education and guidance for all students in year 7 and above, with a particular emphasis on specific career guidance for those students who have been identified by the school as being at risk of leaving school unprepared for the transition to the workplace or further education/training.

NAG 2 (revised from previous NAG4)
Each Board of Trustees with the principal and teaching staff is required to:
i. develop a strategic plan which documents how they are giving effect to the National Education Guidelines through their policies, plans and programmes, including those for curriculum, assessment and staff professional development;
ii. maintain an on-going programme of self-review in relation to the above policies, plans and programmes, including evaluation of information on student achievement;
iii. report to students and their parents on the achievement of individual students, and to the school's community on the achievement of students as a whole and of groups (identified through **1 iii** above) including the achievement of Maori students against the plans and targets referred to in **1 v** above.

NAG 3 (previously NAG2)
According to the legislation on employment and personnel matters, each Board of Trustees is required in particular to:
i. develop and implement personnel and industrial policies, within policy and procedural frameworks set by the Government from time to time, which promote high levels of staff performance, use educational resources effectively and recognise the needs of students;
ii. be a good employer as defined in the State Sector Act 1988 and comply with the conditions contained in employment contracts applying to teaching and non-teaching staff.

NAG 4 (previously NAG 3)
According to legislation on financial and property matters, each Board of Trustees is also required in particular to:
i. allocate funds to reflect the school's priorities as stated in the charter;
ii. monitor and control school expenditure, and ensure that annual accounts are prepared and audited as required by the Public Finance Act 1989 and the Education Act 1989;
iii. comply with the negotiated conditions of any current asset management agreement, and implement a maintenance programme to ensure that the school's buildings and facilities provide a safe, healthy learning environment for students.

NAG 5
Each Board of Trustees is also required to:
i. provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students;
ii. comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees.

NAG 6
Each Board of Trustees is also expected to comply with all general legislation concerning requirements such as attendance, the length of the school day, and the length of the school year.

Right in your own backyard - A description of flexible learning applied to primary teacher education

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Abstract

New Zealand rural schools have frequently faced the issue of attracting and retaining experienced teachers. In 1995 many rural areas in New Zealand, especially some areas of the North Island faced an even more significant teacher shortage. This paper reports on a project developed by the University of Waikato to address the shortage using flexible learning as the means of providing quality teacher education to students who live in the more remote parts of New Zealand. Now in its fifth year, the Mixed Media Programme has provided flexible learning opportunities for mature students, who cannot attend campus-based courses to obtain teacher education through a range of media. This includes limited campus attendance, work in local schools and access to course material through the Internet. The paper suggests that significant effects of this flexible learning programme on rural communities have become evident. These effects include the provision of a greater pool of teachers in many rural areas, the provision of teachers who have knowledge of, and commitment to, their local communities and access to higher education for more people.

Introduction

In 1997 The University of Waikato, began teaching a programme of primary teacher education designed for students who live in more remote areas of the region served by the university. This was in response to a continuing shortage of teachers for a significant number of schools, in the mainly rural areas. The approach has been to recruit and select students, who, when qualified, will live and work in their home districts. It is expected that this will provide teachers with a strong commitment to their own communities. This assumption is based on previous experience of teaching other students in some of these districts in the early 1990s, many of whom have continued to teach in their home area.

Those former programmes relied on face to face contact on a regular basis. The demands on staff in terms of travel and time made this an unattractive option for a new programme. The decision was made to use information technology to reduce the need to travel.

The programme developed is a mixed media approach, one not uncommon amongst a number of other open and flexible learning programmes. Rumble (1997, p. 107) refers to the range of communication technologies used by teachers and students to interact with each other. From that list, the programme offered by the University of Waikato makes use of:

- face to face interaction during on-campus periods;
- individual telephone contact;
- audio-conferences with small groups;
- asynchronous computer conferencing; and
- electronic mail (email) systems.

To participate in the programme students are required to attend three 'block courses' on-campus each year; work approximately one day each week in a local primary school, known as their base school, and use information technology to interact with course material, staff and colleagues.

Computer communication has been the main means of interaction. In the initial stages telephone conferences were used, but the use of this diminished, mainly because of the high cost. Personal computers and the Internet have been the main means of interaction. Email is used for contact on an individual basis. Initially, 'TopClass', a web-based interface developed in Ireland, housed the coursework and also provides access to discussion forums and the library databases. The interface has been further developed and is now housed in 'Class Forum'. This is based on Web Crossing and has been very successful as a means of presenting coursework and as a forum for discussion. Students are able to present their written assignments within individual portfolios. The ability to provide individual feedback in this way has been a very significant feature and has led to the quality of teaching improving markedly. It is likely to have even greater impact as university staff become more familiar with this aspect and become more innovative in their teaching.

This 'low' technology approach to a teacher education programme has been successful to date and meets the needs of students in remote districts where with poorer quality telephone line transmission limits the use of more sophisticated online technology. Using a 'low- tech' approach is certainly proving its worth and may be even more necessary, given that access to Information Communication Technology could be limited in some areas of New Zealand. It was recently reported that some telephone customers are being connected only on the basis that they will agree not to connect to the Internet.

The programme has now been presented for five years and some features are becoming apparent. These features are:

- the flexible teacher education programme that provides teachers for remote areas;
- the way that teachers are provided for their 'home' areas;
- the high success rate of students in the mixed media programme; and
- expressed satisfaction by schools with graduates of the mixed media programme.

Provision to remote areas

As was outlined earlier, the mixed media teacher education programme was specifically designed to meet the needs of remote rural areas. In its five years of existence it has demonstrated the ability to meet that need. Students need to have computer access to be selected and enrol in the programme. In the early stages of the programme, and while a teacher shortage was the main driving factor, local schools made their computer facilities available to some students. However, the majority of the students at that time had their own computers or quickly purchased their own. The current situation is that all students have their own computers. They have been encouraged to do this and it has proven to be helpful in students being able to manage their time effectively and to gain the real benefits of studying at a distance in a flexible way.

The flexibility of learning has been important in enabling students from remote rural areas to become teachers. The do have computer access in the programme but there is also telephone access to the university and to their fellow students. When the programme commenced efforts were made to select groups of students rather than 'isolates'. The intention was to ensure that collegial support was available. This decision has been vindicated in that a number of students fro the initial years found it very difficult to sustain study on their own. Since that time, the university has been even more pro-active in enhancing systems so the students, who are on their own, feel supported.

Even though the programme is for remote areas it has been important to provide strong students support systems. The selection of groups of students has been discussed earlier but other support approaches have been used. These include visits by university staff to the remote areas twice each year to work with the students and with the schools they are based in. This approach has had clear benefits for all in that there is regular contact but the university gains from its presence through the associated publicity. This has been important in the competitive university environment that has existed in New Zealand for some years now. In addition having a single contact person for all administrative contact has been useful. Students in the programme are able to contact one person for all initial inquiries. This provides the students with security but also keeps the administrators of the programme in tune with student concerns.

The final, and probably the most powerful form of support, is between the students themselves. Each year all students in the mixed media programme attend three one week block courses on campus. This is a requirement and is a time when papers are introduced or completed. Students meet their tutors and fellow students and form associations. These associations have been critical in assisting students to pursue their studies when the 'going gets tough'. They have other students to talk with either through electronic means or through the telephone. At no time have the university organised study groups for the students. They do this themselves either on a geographical or friendship basis. It has been most successful and allows students to work with others of similar approaches.

The presentation of the mixed media programme to students in remote areas has been successfully implemented using a range of media approaches and by ensuring that appropriate and accessible support is available to them.

Teachers for 'home areas'

One of the strengths of the mixed media programme has been its ability to provide for students to train as teachers for their 'home areas'. Very often, schools in remote rural areas say that the younger students from their areas attend university campuses but do not return to the 'home area The mixed media programme has addressed that issue to a significant extent. It has allowed more mature students who cannot attend on campus classes to become teachers. Most of these people would have previously not had the opportunity to become teachers and enabling them to do so has meant changes for many of them. The students have made frequent comment on the way that the programme has given them the opportunity to study. Some examples are:

> *I would have done this programme years ago if I had lived close to a university. The programme gives you an opportunity to study at home and still work part time.*
>
> *If you live where we live, this is the only possible way you could do a degree.*
>
> *My family commitments prevent me from attending university full time.*

The success of the mixed media programme has meant that the schools in more remote areas have had greater opportunity to appoint teachers who have empathy and an understanding of the needs of students in their 'home areas'. Since the inception of the programme two groups of students have graduated. There were 48 students the first group to graduate. 46 of these students have now won teaching positions, mostly in their local areas. Only one student has moved from a remote area to a less remote area so it can be concluded that the purpose of providing teachers for 'home areas' is being achieved. It is possible that one of the disadvantages of providing teacher education in this way could be that the teachers are less exposed to the wider world. When the programme was instigated this aspect was considered as the likelihood of teachers becoming very insular needed to be avoided. The initial feeling about this aspect is that the fears have not been realised. The students have gained much from on campus block courses and a requirement that students complete at least one practicum outside of their local school or area has been very beneficial. This should not suggest that all applicants from particular areas be selected just because they happen to live in the area. Selection for teacher education in New Zealand must meet the requirements of the New Zealand Teacher Registration Board and the university's selection policy reflects that. As a form of assistance to the selection process potential students are now asked to nominate a likely base school and have the principal indicate willingness to have the student work in the school. That does not remove all pitfalls but it does help in establishing a potential student's ability to work harmoniously in the local community.

A further strength of the programme that has been welcomed is the way that selection for the programme has reflected local communities. For example in the far North of the North Island and on the East Coast of the North Island there are communities mostly comprised of Maori. As the programme has developed it has become clear that many Maori, especially women feel comfortable studying in this way. Most have no tertiary education experience and often, limited secondary schooling but have come to the programme with enthusiasm and determination. In 2001, about 30% of the student intake are Maori. While some have not succeeded there have been some outstanding successes for these students and their appointment to positions in local schools has enhanced the learning opportunities in these schools.

Success rate for students

One of the significant features of the mixed media teacher education programme has been the high success rate of the students. This is shown in the retention rate of students and in their academic success. High retention rates are found in the first two groups of students. In the first group, 48 of 52 students completed in 1999 and for the second group, 60 of 72 students completed in 2000. While the second group is lower than the first group, the retention rate is still high when compared with many distance education programmes that have experienced high drop out rates. The current retention rates appear to be dropping and although it is not alarming it is marked. The comparison between groups is difficult, as there are suggestions that a number of factors are impacting on the retention rate. One is that the commitment of students in the early years of the programme was higher because of the innovative nature of the programme. It is possible that as the programme becomes more institutionalised, the commitment of students may lessen and lead to higher drop out rates of students. This is an aspect that is being investigated and will be reported on in the future, as will the possible effect of financial difficulty.

Students in the mixed media programme have experienced considerable academic success. This has been shown through consistently high grades in coursework and evident expertise in practicum experiences. Further evidence of this has comet through the number of students eligible to enter the Bachelor of Teaching Honours programme. Of the 1999 graduates 38 of 48 were offered entry while 31 of the 59 students had the opportunity. Because the Honours programme is not offered in an online form no students have yet taken the opportunity to complete an Honours degree although a small number have commenced graduate study.

A number of reasons for the high academic success have been proposed. The first is the level of commitment shown by the students is very high. As was commented previously there could be a lessening of this commitment but the majority of students enter the programme with fierce determination and a will to succeed. The majority are taken their second chance at education. They are generally mature students. They know the cost of their studies and know that their success depends on the efforts they make.

The second reason suggested for high academic success by mixed media students is the life experience they bring to their studies. The students they have life experiences as parents and in other occupations. This gives them rich experiences to draw upon as they complete academic tasks. This balances their lack of success in earlier schooling and allows them to approach teacher education with greater confidence.

School satisfaction with the mixed media programme

With two groups of students having graduated, there has been the opportunity to find out whether the programme meets the needs of schools in remote rural areas. While it must be conceded that there is not still the staffing shortage that drove the programme initially, students from the programme have appointed many graduates. The fact that the potential teachers are local people has an influence on appointment but it is not the only criteria. The schools need to know that the graduates are equipped to be strong classroom teachers. Evidence gained from a recent study indicates that there is general satisfaction with the quality of graduates. Barr (2000), quotes a school principal, who sums up the perceived strength of the programme,

> *The whole thing has worked to the advantage of both parties. It has worked for us as a base school and it has worked for the students placed*

> *here We had good people and the judgements we have made on the programme have been based on success.*

The mixed media teacher education programme has provided a successful opportunity for people who live in remote areas to study at home and to become primary teachers. The schools involved are consistent in their acknowledgment of the programme's quality and the impact it has in alleviating teacher shortage and in providing greater impetus for many small school communities.

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Barr, H. (2000). *A study of the University of Waikato bachelor of teaching degree taught through mixed media.* (Unpublished). Hamilton: The University of Waikato.

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